

## The Little Baptist

By J.M. Martin

*"And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." 2 Timothy 3:15*

### Chapter 12

#### Discussion Of Baptism

Mellie is again at home with her mother. Seven years of her life have gone by since she was first introduced to the reader. She has grown much; and observation, experience and education, have done for her all that could have been done for any one under like circumstances. She is yet small, though now a young lady, and her intelligence is such, that she is peculiarly attractive. Her acquaintances still speak of her as "Little Mellie;" and the little "Baptist Bible," though greatly damaged by use, is still preserved. She has read, and reread, until she is familiar with its teachings; and pencil marks, designating noted texts, are found on many of its pages. She remains true to her first impression that it is a Baptist book; and she intends that it shall not be long until it will be no mistake when her friends call her the "Little Baptist." Having taken proper time to deliberate, she is now resolved to act. She desires to obey her Saviour, by her own voluntary action, in the ordinances of His church. She no longer looks specially and solely to "the recompense of the reward," but is moved by a sense of duty. She recognizes the right of Christ to command, and the duty of His followers to obey. In the Bible she finds the path of duty plainly marked out. She having believed, intends soon to be baptized, emblematically showing her faith in a buried and risen Saviour. It was something of a trial for her to leave the church in which she had been *nominally* a member, and in which her relatives for several generations had lived and died; yet she calmly counted the cost, decided upon her course, and moved steadily forward. Her mother, having adopted her views, of course, became a tower of strength to her, though so firm was her faith, that had she been left to act alone, she would have done what she felt that her Saviour required of her. Mellie and Frank had often tried their skill at argument; and, in many well contested conflicts, Mellie had held her ground nobly and triumphantly. This was, in part, because she knew more of the Bible than Frank, but more especially because the Bible favored her side of the question.

Frank, with all his virtues, had acquired some very aristocratic notions. He had much pride, and looked forward with ambitious hopes to fame and popular applause. A partiality for the Presbyterian church was early instilled into him, and he had a denominational pride that made him jealous of its fame. And, too, a majority of the most wealthy people of the community belonged to this church, or were under its influence; this, to one who felt himself to be a "rising man," was a natural stimulant to him to keep "fair weather" in that direction. He determined that, if possible, he would prevent his mother and Mellie from leaving their church. He had tried in every way to dissuade them from the too free expression of their opinions; which he saw was destined to bring trouble on the church, and afford gossip for the whole community. But finding them determined and immovable, he resorted to the strategy of having Dr. Farnsworth to

casually call to spend the day with them. Frank hoped that the Doctor, by his great learning and powers of argument, might succeed in influencing them to change their purpose; not reflecting that God sometimes chooses the weak to confound the mighty, and the foolish to confound the wise.

Early on Monday morning, Dr. Farnsworth called at Col. Brown's to make a last effort to reclaim his "erring members," as he had frequently called Mrs. Brown and Mellie. He was somewhat encouraged by seeing them in their accustomed seats the day previous, and especially as he discovered no change in the countenance of either of them when he made some heavy thrusts at the "heresies of the times" - a few remarks that had been well prepared for a special object, but which were, seemingly, only casually thrown into the discourse.

As soon as it appeared polite to do so, Dr. Farnsworth accosted Mellie in a kind of flattering manner, relative to the improvement made on her by the country school, and being little disposed to waste time in ceremonies, he said:

"How is it, Mellie, that you, being so small, are attracting so much attention in the community? It appears that *your person*, and *your opinions* are monopolizing the attention of the whole town."

Mellie blushed, and for an instance seemed overcome with diffidence, but on regaining her composure, she replied. "I think the compliment must be overdrawn, Doctor. If my person is attractive, I do not know why, unless people think the old saying is true, that 'valuable articles are always put up in small packages;' and, as regards my opinions, I cannot suppose they are entitled to any great attention. Please enlighten me further as to your meaning, Doctor."

Somewhat at a loss for words leading him in the right direction, the Doctor said: "Well, Mellie, you are reported to have some very strange ideas for a Presbyterian, especially, on the subject of baptism, and I wish to have a candid talk with you for the purpose of trying to correct your errors. I, as your pastor, have felt it my duty to seek this interview with you, which liberty I hope you will not construe into an offense."

"By no means," replied Mellie, "I thank you for the interests manifested, and will gladly hear all that you may wish to say. I assure you that I only desire to know the truth. I would rather be a Presbyterian than not if I could feel sure that the Bible sustained their views. I want the Bible to be my guide, and intend to try to go where it leads me."

"Well, the *truth*, Mellie, is, that you were baptized in your infancy, and you should be satisfied with *that*, and give the subject no further attention," said the Doctor, in a rather impatient manner.

"But, Doctor," said Mellie, "my baptism in infancy was no act of mine, and Christ commands *me* to be baptized. I have recently become a believer in Christ, and I find that He has laid down my duty in plain language, and requires of me obedience. I, as you know, was wholly unconscious of what my parents did for me in my infancy, and now I cannot make it *my* act of obedience. For, if I understand the Bible, it teaches that

all obedience must be personal and voluntary, else it is not acceptable."

The Doctor very gravely replied: "Have you never reflected on what a solemn thing it is for you to call in question what your parents did for you within the covenant of grace, whereby you were received among God's elect children and accepted a member of His church?"

"Dr. Farnsworth," said Mellie, "please take the Bible and show me where my parents are commanded to have their children baptized; that will settle the controversy, and reclaim me at once from my errors, if I am in error."

The Doctor was sensible of his situation, but to make a fair appearance, he must do something, so he said: "Some things are not expressed, but merely implied; and there are some things that must be drawn from inference."

"Is the duty to baptize believers, a command or and inference?" asked Mellie.

"Clearly a command - that is, provided they have not been baptized in infancy," answered the Doctor.

"But where is this exception found, Doctor?" said Mellie. "What I want to see is a command to baptize infants."

Contrary to his expectations, the Doctor was entrapped, and his courage faltered. To be asked to show a command for the baptism of infants, when he well knew that the Bible did not contain one word on the subject, was placing him in a position that sorely puzzled him. Yet he looked as wise as he could while turning the Bible, and finally read the noted text, "Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

To this Mellie replied: "Yes; I have read that many times, and can't see even an *inference* that He baptized them. Now, theyh brought the children to Christ, we will accept this as a *fact*; then the question is, *what did Christ do?* The Bible tells plainly what He did; He *took them in in His arms*; He *laid His hands on them*; then, He *blessed them* - that is all, and we have no right to infer anything more. If He baptized them, why does not the Bible say so? Christ said to His disciples: 'Except ye repent and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.' In this text, Christ was endeavoring to teach a lesson of humility - that they should be innocent, humble and dependent. There is no baptism in this; but, Doctor, if there is anywhere in the Bible, a command to baptize infants, surely you can find it."

Dr. Farnsworth then remarked: "I suppose you have read of the jailor and his household; of Lydia and her household; and of Stephanas and his house all being baptized. And, of course, among so many household baptisms, there must have been children. We should infer that there were children in some of them, at least."

"But," said Mellie, "is it not just as easy to infer that there *were not* any children? It would be as reasonable, and I think much safer, to only believe what the Bible says,

and no more. Suppose you were a stranger in town, and some one should tell you that Esquire Thomson and his household were baptized, or that Mr. Morris and his house were baptized, you might infer that some infants were baptized, as a matter of course, but you see this would be a mistake, because in one, the children are all grown, and in the other, there never were any children. And if you will look into the different households in town, you will find that about one half contain no infants. As regards the jailor's house, whoever may have been the members of it, it is certain that they were not infants, for they all *believed* and *rejoiced* together. And as to Lydia, it is stretching the inference rather far, it seems to me, to say that she had infant children. But the Bible settles this, leaving no room for inference. For when Paul and Silas returned again to the house of Lydia, they 'comforted the brethren;' so, whatever they were, they were called 'brethren,' and, therefore were not infants."

"O, yes," said the Doctor, "I see that you have the Baptist argument very well. I must confess that you are an apt scholar. But you have never yet realized the *gist* of the question. What ought to satisfy you, or anyone else, is the inference to be drawn from the law of circumcision, which was instituted in the family of Abraham. And because baptism has come in the place of circumcision, children ought to be baptized just as they were required to be circumcised."

"But, Doctor," said Mellie, "I am governed by my Bible; will you please enlighten me by showing the passage which says that baptism came in the place of circumcision? I have heard that asserted so often, yet after searching the Bible through, I have failed to find it."

"I do not pretend to say," said he, "that it is there at all, just in so many words, but that is the inference drawn from various expressions and circumstances."

Mrs. Brown had preserved silence from the first, and intended not to interfere in the discussion, but after Dr. Farnsworth had failed to point out any Scripture bearing directly upon the subject at issue, her patience became exhausted, and she exclaimed: "Inference! I hoped you could give us some reason if not Scripture, for the practice of infant baptism. If the whole theory hangs on inference, why not tell the people so plainly?"

The Doctor stopped for a drink of water, and Mellie asked him: "To whom was the law of circumcision given?"

"To the Jews, through Abraham," said he.

"Well, then, to whom was the law of baptism given?"

"The law of baptism was given to the disciples, or, I might say, to Christian."

"I do not wish to be impertinent," said Mellie, "but let me inquire if the Jews did not strictly obey the law of circumcision?"

"They did, most scrupulously so, and do to this day," said he.

"Then, Doctor, ought not the Christian to be content with obeying the law given especially to them, without going to the Jews to borrow a part of their rites?"

As the Doctor was slow framing an answer to the last question, Mrs. Brown remarked: "For my part, I don't believe that God has left any duty to be learned from mere inference. The Jews had a plain law; they understood it and obeyed it. Christians have the law of baptism as plain as language can make it, therefore they ought to observe it."

"Yes," said Mellie, "God wanted believers to be baptized, and He told us so. He did not tell us to baptize infants, therefore it is safe to infer that He did not want us to do that."

Dr. Farnsworth referred, at some length, to the "customs of the church," and to the "writings of the Fathers," and told what many men of piety had said and written upon the subject, and began to quote extensively from ecclesiastical history, but Mellie stopped him by replying that she only proposed to inquire what the Bible said; that she had determined to take the Bible for her guide, and would not be influenced by what the history of the past might teach, or by the opinions of fallible men; that the Bible should govern her faith, and be the rule of her actions; she would obey what she could understand, and any duty not plainly revealed, she was sure God did not require of her. She said: "I can understand the duty of all believers to be baptized, but I cannot understand how anything done for them by their parents, can excuse them from personal obedience. And no one can obey a command without faith, 'for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.'"

"I acknowledge that you are a close reasoner, Mellie," said Dr. Farnsworth; "but you and I look at things from very different standpoints. I yet hope that you may see your error, and not be led off from the church in which you have been dedicated to God. Don't you think that your course is showing a want of respect for your parents, and treating the church even with disrespect?"

"Let it be so," said Mrs. Brown, a little more irritated than she ought to have been. "If the Scriptures don't authorize infant baptism, (and if they do you fail to discover it), let her obey Christ for herself. I intend that Mellie shall do as she believes her Bible teaches her is right. I have been a long time thinking about this subject myself, and since you fail to show the authority, I am fully satisfied that there is neither precept nor example for the practice of our church on the subject of baptism. I just consider that I have not been baptized myself, and the church, or the ministers, are to blame for it. I have followed the teachings of men without learning my duty as revealed in the Bible, and that is why this precept has been neglected."

Dr. Farnsworth took up his hat preparatory to leaving but Mellie entreated him to remain longer and answer her a few questions relative to the mode or action of baptism. To this he reluctantly assented, and told her to proceed with her questions.

"Don't you think that Christ was baptized by immersion?" asked Mellie.

The Doctor said: "I am not bound to admit that He was. It is possible, yet by no means

certain. But grant that He was immersed in the river Jordan, as you and your Baptist friends contend, we are not in the least bound by that. Christian baptism was not instituted until the giving of the Commission; and you know that the baptism of John, that Christ received, has never been considered by our church as Christian baptism."

"Does not the term Christian mean Christ like?" asked Mellie. "And what is Christian baptism if it is not to be baptized in the same manner that Christ Himself was? He said to His disciples, 'follow me,' and I am sure that if we follow Him, we will never do an *unchristian* act. Then did not Philip baptize the Eunuch after the giving of the Commission? It appears to me that the Commission neither introduced any new rite, nor changed an old one. It enlarged the disciples' field of labor - nothing more. Prior to this, they had been restricted to the Jews; now they are told to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature - not to the Jews alone, now but go teach all nations, and whosoever believeth and is baptized, shall be saved."

Dr. Farnsworth referred again to the case of Philip and the Eunuch, and said: "Because they both went down into the water, it does not necessarily follow that there was an immersion; for on the day of Pentecost there were added to the disciples about three thousand souls, and were all baptized. This, you must know, could not have been done by immersion, because there was not time enough."

"But, Doctor," said Mellie, "pray tell me how much more time it takes to immerse than to sprinkle a person? As all of the apostles were there together, they could have divided them out, and immersed them in a short time. The apostles could easily have immersed 3,000 persons in four and a half hours. That is only one a minute. In India three Baptist preachers immersed 2,222 in 6 hours. Twelve could at that rate have immersed 8,888 in six hours. Some of them, however, may have waited until the next day or the next week, as the Bible does not say when they were baptized, only that they were added to the church that day. Could they not have made a profession of discipleship that day and have received baptism afterward? You will allow me to *infer* this, will you not?"

"Yes, yes," said the Doctor, "you can *infer* anything you please."

"So you will agree, Doctor, that inference is an unsafe guide, I presume?"

"Not always - not necessarily so; but, Mellie, how do you fix it up about the baptism of the Holy Ghost, which was *poured* out upon the people? The people were immersed, were they?"

"I suppose," said Mellie, "that the influence of the Holy Spirit on this occasion was *overwhelming*, therefore figuratively called a baptism. The figure so well represents immersion, that it is appropriately called a baptism. Why not call this a baptism on account of its over-whelming power, as well for Christ to have called His sufferings a baptism? I suppose that when ministers pray for a baptism of the Holy Spirit, they mean an immersion - an overwhelming effect; they certainly don't mean *just a little*, like sprinkling."

"O, but," said the Doctor, "you forget that the Bible speaks of the pouring out of the

Spirit, what does this mean?"

"Well, it means, no doubt," said Mellie, "just what you meant on yesterday, when in your sermon you became a little poetical, and spoke of the 'sun *pouring his rays* down on the earth on a July moon.' In both instances the speakers used figurative language, and the idea has reference to the *power* and *not* to the manner. You would never say the sun pours down his rays early in the morning, but you would say, 'The gentle beams of the rising sun.' as some poet has said; and young as I am, I have learned that there is a limit to the ideas in figures of speech and poetical allusions, as well as in other cases."

"Your imagination is very prolific, I find," said the Doctor, "and I presume you can see that Christ was immersed on the cross because He referred to His sufferings as a baptism?"

"No," replied Mellie, "I *can't* see that He was immersed on the cross, nor *can I* see that He was either *poured* or *sprinkled* on the cross, but I *can* see that He was *overwhelmed* with sufferings. It is not uncommon to hear persons speak of being 'overwhelmed with sorrows,' or of being 'immersed in cares,' or 'immersed in business.' Such expressions may be heard frequently, but no one yet has so warped the figure as to say, 'poured with sorrows,' 'poured in cares,' or 'sprinkled in business.' Figures are strictly representative. Don't you remember that the hymn you used on yesterday begins,

'Plunged in a gulf of dark despair,  
We wretched sinners law,'

thus presenting an idea in figurative language that we readily comprehend. We know that by the word *plunged*, the poet meant *overwhelmed*; and another poet has described our condition by nature as being

'Overwhelmed in sin and sore distress.'

Then there is mamma's favorite hymn, beginning,

'There is a fountain filled with blood,  
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,  
And sinners *plunged* beneath that flood  
Lose all their guilty stains.'

Such figures of speech are easily understood only when they occur in the Bible with reference to baptism."

"Since I have turned questioner," said Dr. Farnsworth, "let me inquire how were the people 'baptized unto Moses, in the cloud and in the sea'? The waters were divided, standing, on either side of the Israelites as they went through, there was also the cloud; and I wish to see how you avoid the conclusion that the spray from the sea, and a shower of rain from the cloud, sprinkled the people so as to be very appropriately termed a baptism."

"I take this as another figurative allusion," she said, "and not a literal fact. I do not read of any *spray* arising from the sea, whose waters stood *congealed* on either side; nor do I read of any cloud that was likely to have produced a shower of rain. My Bible describes a significance of the presence of the Almighty, appearing as a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night, to guide the Israelites in their journey, and assure them of His protection; but I cannot suppose that any person really believes that this cloud gave forth a shower of rain. This Bible says they went over dry shod. The allusion to baptism is only figurative, but if it could be construed into a literal baptism at all, it would be because the water formed a wall on either side, and the cloud covered them above, thus enveloping them. But the most reasonable interpretation, it occurs to me, is that the Israelites, going out of Egyptian bondage, and witnessing their miraculous salvation at the sea, in going through, acknowledged their allegiance to Moses as their leader and deliverer, just as a person by baptism renounces the bondage of Satan and professes allegiance to Christ. Hence the event is called a baptism unto Moses. Now you know, Doctor, that I take nothing as a proof in doctrine or practice except the Bible, but Dr. McKnight was a good Presbyterian, and as he understood it about as I have expressed it, he may be authority with you, so I will read what he says: 'And all were baptized into the belief of Moses' divine mission, by their being hidden from the Egyptians in the cloud, and by their passage through the sea miraculously.' And again he says: 'Because the Israelites, by being hid from the Egyptians under the cloud, and by passing through the Red Sea, were made to declare their belief in the Lord and His servant Moses, the apostle very properly represents them as being baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.'"

The Doctor had despaired of accomplishing the object of his visit; and being narrowed down to the Bible in the discussion, he, as a matter of course, could say but little. He had been interested in drawing out Mellie's opinions merely to see what arguments and explanations she was able to make in relation to the doctrine that she was advocating. After satisfying himself that she was fully posted in the Scriptures and would hear nothing outside, he said: "Mellie, I see that you are determined to have your own way; therefore it is but a waste of time for me to reason with you. It is strange, yet, nevertheless true, that when any person imbibes Baptist sentiments, they become hardheaded and unteachable; they invariably fall back on the Bible, and you can't get them away from it. If you, Mellie, would only listen to me, I could produce history and the writings of the Fathers of the church, to show you clearly that sprinkling and pouring were most probably the original manner of administering baptism. But, if this is not so, the church has changed the mode, yet retained the same object, and our adopted practice does just as well, besides being much more convenient."

Mellie impatiently replied: "I do not care what history says, nor what the Fathers in the church have said, and it makes no difference to me how many times the church has changed Christ's ordinances, I am to be governed by what I understand the Bible to say, and, so far, you have declined to assume that the Bible says one word about infant baptism, and have given no proof that it favors sprinkling or pouring for baptism."

"I have repeatedly told you, Mellie," said he, "that it does not in so many words command the baptism of infants, yet I think that it indirectly teaches it, and according to history, it was practiced a few centuries after the days of the apostles."

"You are a Greek scholar, Doctor, and please to candidly answer me one question: Does the Greek word that means sprinkle, occur in connection with baptism, anywhere in the New Testament?"

He replied: "I *candidly* answer that I do not know that it does. But you should not think that the quantity of water makes any difference. Baptism is the *application* of water, and just so the water is used, it is sufficient - a little answers as well as *much*."

"O, I see!" said Mellie, as a new idea flashed into her mind; "I see now the difference; you believe that the virtue or significance of baptism is in the water, or in the application of water, while I believe that it is in an action performed in water. You believe that the application of water is beneficial to the subject, while I believe that the action in water only illustrates or symbolizes a benefit already received. I now better understand the language of the Confession of Faith where it speaks of baptism being a 'sign and seal,' etc. I never before realized the difference that there appears to be in the objects intended by Baptists and Pedobaptists. They do not baptize for the same purpose, I discover. But to give you my reasons for believing the Baptists to be right, would require me to go back over the same ground that we have already traveled in this discussion, and as I do not expect to convert you to my belief, I will only give you one or two illustrations, which, I think, are to the point. When Pilate could not prevail on the people to release Christ, and they 'cried out, crucify Him,' he took water and washed his hands in the presence of the multitude, and said: 'I am innocent of the blood of this just man.' Pilate declared his innocence by words, and emblematically illustrated the fact by the washing of his hands in, or with water. The action spoke a language - it had a meaning - it was not to produce or insure his innocence, but to *declare* it. Again: To teach them a lesson of humility, Christ washed His disciples' feet. The illustration, the symbol, the emblematical import of the declaration was humility; but was this signified by the water. Most assuredly not, but by the act itself. Now, could this lesson of humility have been impressed by pouring or sprinkling a few drops of water on the disciples' feet? or on their shoes only? Would this act have illustrated innocence or humility? No, but it would have come just as near to it as the sprinkling of a few drops of water on a lady's false hair and ribbons, (as I saw the Methodist preacher do) represents a death to sin and a resurrection to a new life. The more I investigate the two theories, the more they seem to diverge from each other. I am amazed at the difference."

"But, Mellie," replied Dr. Farnsworth, "baptism by pouring represents the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, and the water is emblematical of the influence of, or the purification of the Spirit. Don't you see how this is?"

"Yes," said Mellie, "I comprehend *your idea* of it. It seems to me that you assume to do a thing that can't be done. The Spirit is poured out, *not in form*, but only in *power*. You cannot tell how the Holy Spirit works, therefore you cannot illustrate the manner of working. That the wind blows, we know; of its power we know; but *how* it blows we do not know, nor can we illustrate it. Can you, by pouring a few drops of water, illustrate the manner in which the sun pours his rays down on the earth on a hot summer day? No; because you can conceive neither the shape, form, nor manner of its action. Neither can you illustrate the manner of an act of the Holy Spirit. But immersion illustrates a

*professed fact*, experimentally realized, an *effect* previously produced, and it beautifully illustrates some of the most important doctrines of the godpel. But I beg pardon, Doctor, for taking so long, and will close by suggesting that we read the Bible thoroughly, and pray for more light on the subject."

Dr. Farnsworth arose, saying: "I see that you are joined to your idols, Mellie, so I may as well let you alone; but I hope that *you*, sister Brown, will reconsider the matter, and become convinced of the impropriety of expressing sentiments that you know to be prejudicial to our church."

"I have taken but little part in the discussion today," said Mrs. Brown, "because I have preferred to listen rather than talk, but I have noticed one thing, especially; that is, that you rely but little on the Bible to support the usages of our church; and if I should say some things not endorsed by you, if the Bible sustains me in it, I think that I would be justifiable. It seems to me that if you have to go to history to support a practice of the church that the Bible says not one word about, you should not be surprised if the people think very strange of you when you preach to them the duty of reading and obeying the Scriptures, and taking it as the man of their counsel. John Calvin was an honest man; he said that the original mode of baptism was immersion, but that the church had changed it to affusion. He received the Bible teachings on the subject, but thought that the church had the right to make the change. I don't believe that the church has any right to change one of Christ's ordinances. Then the great John Wesley, whose followers preach against immersion, said that it was 'the ancient manner of baptizing.' His writings are here in the library by the side of John Calvin's, and if you doubt what I say, you can get the books and read for yourself."

"I am much surprised, sister Brown," said the Doctor, "to find your mind in such a state. I had become convinced that Mellie would go off from us, but I must express my deep sorrow that *you*, too, will persist in speaking against the doctrines and usages of our church, as you are doing. Your own self-respect should cause you to say less, or voluntarily leave the church."

Mrs. Brown replied: "To God and my own conscience I appeal for the rectitude of my purpose and conduct; and as God will judge me in the last day, I shall make His book the guide for my future course. I will not let the church dictate to me what I shall believe, or what I shall say."

The pastor left in not a very pleasant humor, reflecting on the weakness of the human intellect, especially when it has a leaning toward Baptist sentiments.

~ end of chapter 12 ~

\*\*\*