

## **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 11**

#### **Baptismal Regeneration - Mellie's Conversion**

After graduating with high honors, Frank Brown returned from College and commenced the practice of law. As regards outward forms, he was a Presbyterian of the strictest fashion. He was punctual to attend church; contributed liberally to the support of his pastor; and duly observed the Sabbath. Moral and chaste in all his deportment, he was esteemed a model young man. He had great faith in the church and its ordinances, but to the effects of saving grace on the heart, he was wholly a stranger, as will hereafter appear. He was learned in the sciences taught in the schools, but the science of Christianity he had never studied. He had often heard it repeated that baptism places the child within the "covenant of grace," and he doubted not that there was a good reason for such expressions, hence the appeals from the pulpit to "repent and turn to God," were by him unheeded. That he was under obligations of render a personal obedience to the requirements of the gospel, was a thing he had not considered. Mellie's letter, and his mother's reply, attracted his attention with peculiar force, and he said:

"Mother, why did you have us all baptized if it is true, as you wrote to sister, that it does us no good, and leaves us 'children of wrath, even as others' who have never had this advantage - if advantage it be?"

"Because," said Mrs. Brown, "the customs and rules of the church require it. I don't know any other reason. I never questioned that it was right, still I can't see any good it does." Well, if there is no good to arise from it," said Frank, "I don't see any use there is for the practice. It is plainly taught in the Catechism and Confession of Faith, as well as many other books that I have read, as a positive duty; but, then, if it don't do children any good to baptize them, it is all a piece of hum buggery - just calculated to deceive children. If baptized children are not Christians, not regenerated, and have no advantage of unbaptized children, common sense teaches me that they ought not to be in church."

"My son," said his mother, "I cannot dispute your reasoning. I have been thinking much on this subject of late. I intend to give it a further examination in the light of God's truth, and see if I can find any authority for the practice. The gospel is, of course, addressed to us personally. Each individual must hear, believe and obey for himself. I am fully satisfied that the baptism of child on the faith of its parents, is not the act of the child, nor can it possibly be transferred so as to answer for the child's obedience. No act of a parent can release the child from obligation to obey the commands of Christ whenever it reaches a stage of accountability. Repentance, faith and baptism, are alike personal

duties, which cannot be performed by another."

"Well, mother, that is strange talk to come from one who has always been considered such a reliable and devoted Presbyterian, and has been so much interested in having her children brought up in the same fold. Surely, little sister has turned you to a Baptist too."

"It is true, Frank, that Mellie did put me to thinking; and thinking and reading together, have gone far toward settling me in the Baptist faith. It has caused me to doubt much that once I accepted as true, just because other people said it was so. I am yet undecided as to what course to pursue, but the more I investigate the subject, the more doubts I have relative to the Bible authority for my baptism, and for infant baptism too. I do think, too, that there is a growing disposition among too many of the different denominations, and with our church less than others, to, in a good degree, ignore experimental religion. They make it too much of mental training - place too much stress on educating the young to Christianity."

"Surely, mother," said Frank, "the better educated people are, the better Christians they will make, for

'If ignorance is bless,  
Tis folly to be wise.'

"Very true, my son," continued Mrs. Brown; "the more education the better, if it be rightly used; but, I mean, that there is with some a reliance on it for salvation. There is a tendency to teach children to be Christians, when they should be taught that *they are sinners*, in need of regenerating grace. True religion consists not in mental training, but in a change of heart, and this can only be effected by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Saviour said: 'They shall all be taught of God.' Our moral nature is depraved, and something more than education is required to purify it. All the mental culture in the world cannot renew the heart of the sinner. So far as it enlightens the judgment, enabling the sinner to realize the necessity of regeneration, it comes in as a valuable acquisition; but if it tends not to humility, there is danger of its proving a curse. For while education increases our responsibility, it cannot discover a new way to Heaven; for 'strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life.' The wise, as well as the ignorant, must humbly trust in Christ, who is the only name given whereby we may be saved. And it is said that 'the wisdom of men is foolishness with God,' and that there are some things that God has hidden from the wise, and yet revealed unto babes."

Several days had passed since the last conversation, when Frank came into his mother's room and said: "Now, mother, to want to show you that there is a virtue in the baptism of infants, else our church, and all other churches that practice it are wrong. How could so many good and wise men be mistaken, and why should they teach that baptism regenerates the child, if it is not so?"

"You are mistaken, Frank," said his mother; "*our* church does not teach baptismal regeneration, nor any of the other churches, as far as I know. They don't baptize children to make them Christians."

"No, mother, I am not mistaken; I have the *documents* on it, as the lawyers say. Here is the Episcopalians' 'Book of Common Prayer,' and in the formula for the baptism of infants, after baptism, the minister says: 'Seeing now that *this child* is regenerated and grafted into the holy body of Christ's church, let us give thanks unto Almighty God for these benefits, and with one accord make our prayers unto Him, that [u]this child[/i] may lead the rest of his life according to this beginning.' Again: 'We yield Thee hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it has pleased Thee to regenerate this infant with Thy Holy Spirit, to receive him for Thine own child by adoption, and to incorporate him into Thy Holy church.' This is on page 220; and then on page 234, in the Catechism, they say: 'There are two sacraments necessary to salvation - that is to say, Baptism and the Lord's Supper.' Then they say again: 'There are two parts to a sacrament: the outward visible sign, and the inward spiritual grace.' In baptism, 'water is the outward visible sign,' and 'a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness,' the invisible sign. 'For being by nature born in sin, and the children of wrath, we are hereby (by baptism) made the children of grace.'"

"Do the Episcopalians teach *that* doctrine?" asked Mrs. Brown, with a look of surprise.

"Yes, indeed they do," said Frank, "and that's not all. Here is the Methodists' Discipline, and on page 27, edition 1859, it reads: 'Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized, but it is the sign of regeneration, or the new birth.' Baptism is also called a sacrament, and a sacrament is defined to be 'a certain sign of God's good will toward us, by the which He doth work invisibly in us, and confirm our faith in Him' - page 26. In the formula, the minister prays to God to 'grant that *this child* now about to be baptized, may receive the fullness of Thy grace, and ever remain in the number of Thy faithful and elect children.' Now, if there is not a *little* baptismal regeneration in this, I must confess that I do not understand the right use of language."

"Well, well - perhaps they have some way of explaining it differently," remarked Mrs. Brown.

"Well, but, mother," replied Frank, "they have no right to explain it differently. They have put it in the book in plain language, and they have no right to explain it away. If they meant something else, they should have put something else in the book, and have said exactly what they meant. Besides, if it is not the truth, its standing in the book is liable to do great harm, because they can't always have somebody present when the book is being read, to give the explanation, and children, whether they are regenerated or not, are liable to believe that such was intended by their baptism. But now let us take up our old, and time honored Confession of Faith, and see what 'we Presbyterians' think about it. On page 145, the book says: 'Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace.' *Signs and seals* - please notice that, mother! On page 148, it says: 'Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible church, but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins,' etc. *Sign and seal* again, mother! Then, on page 340, it says further: 'The parts of a sacrament are two: the one, an outward and sensible sign, used

according to Christ's own appointment; the other, an inward and spiritual grace thereby signified.' A *sign* which *signifies inward grace*, notice if you please. Now, is not this strong language, and to the point too? And with these declarations standing in *our* book of *faith*, how are we to escape the charge of believing in baptismal regeneration? To view the language in the most liberal sense, baptism is an outward sign of an inward and spiritual grace. The child baptized has this grace before baptism, or gains possession of it in baptism. If not, the sign bears false testimony. Has not sister the sign signifying grace within? And did you not have the sign placed here? The question now is, has she the grace signified? If not, the sign placed upon her in the solemn name of the Trinity, testifies to that which is false. I know you did not intend for this solemn service to bear false testimony, and the preacher certainly knew what he was doing. So I conclude that the doctrine must be true; for our preachers are all learned men, and know much more than I do about the Bible."

Mrs. Brown was thoroughly confused, but she ventured at last to say: "I don't believe that baptism or any outward ceremony confers or seals any spiritual grace, and therefore, I see no reason for baptizing children before they are capable of understanding and acting for themselves. I can find no Bible authority, now even a reasonable excuse for it. Still I do not charge my church with believing in baptismal regeneration. The old fathers may have done so long ago, when the church was just merging out of the dark ages of ignorance and superstition, but our people have outgrown that now; they don't preach it, and I presume they do not understand the book to teach that anyone is saved by baptism."

"Maybe not *by* baptism," said Frank, "but *on account of*, or *in consideration* of baptism, the Holy Spirit regenerates the child. I read on page 152, that 'The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time when it is administered, yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsels of God's own will, in His appointed time.' And I am sure, mother, that all the baptized children are regenerated, or *will be*, for on page 461, the rule is 'All baptized persons are members of the church, are under its care, and subject to its government and discipline; and when they have arrived at the years of discretion, they are bound to perform all the duties of church members.'"

Mrs. Brown took the book and read on page 151: "Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it that no person can be regenerated and saved without it, or that all that are baptized are undoubtably regenerated."

She asked Frank to go into the library and bring Dick's Lectures on Theology, which she knew to be a standard work in her church, and whatever it taught might be regarded as orthodox Presbyterianism. While he was gone she pondered the question: is grace in any way connected with baptism? The book was brought, and she opened it, and on page 475 read: "Baptism being a Divine institution, no adult person can safely neglect it; yet it is not so connected with salvation that unbaptized children are excluded from the kingdom of Heaven. We cannot persuade ourselves that the salvation of infants is so much in the power of their parents that they can deprive them of eternal life, by their

carelessness or deliberate wickedness. Baptism is only a sign of the communication of spiritual blessings; and we entertain, no doubt, that as the sign is not always accompanied with the thing signified, so the thing signified is often enjoyed without the sign."

Frank interrupted the reading by saying: "Well, mother, I think that is strange reasoning to come from a man like Dr. Dick. He seems to argue that baptism is somehow connected with the conferring of grace, and a very important thing; yet the 'carelessness or deliberate wickedness' of the parents will insure the salvation of the child just as well. Oh, for the jewel of consistency!"

Mrs. Brown continued to read: "We do not with some Baptists and too many Protestants, and particularly with some half-popish Divines of the Church of England, hold the strange unscriptural opinion, which is too much countenanced by the language of their liturgy, that baptism is regeneration... We are convinced that there is a baptism of the Spirit, distinct from the baptism of water; that the former does not always accompany the latter; and that God gives the Spirit to whom He pleases, without limiting the gift to the usage of the sign." "This," said Mrs. Brown, "I think is sensible."

"Sensible, it may be," said Frank, "but who can tell after all what is really the doctrine of the Presbyterian church on this subject? Baptismal regeneration is taught in one place and contradicted in another; and while Dr. Dick holds on the one hand that it is efficacious in conferring and signifying grace, on the other he admits that God gives the Spirit to whom He will, independent of baptism. If the Pedobaptist churches do not mean to teach that infants are regenerated by baptism, they ought to change the language of their creeds and rituals, for there is danger of thousands of children being deceived, as I was by reading them. Why don't they have their books to say what they mean, and to mean what they say? For surely no good can come of mystifying a plain subject; and if it is true that the churches have outgrown their creeds, why don't they make new ones, else fall back on the Bible?"

Mrs. Brown was called away to attend to some domestic duties, and the conversation here ended.

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Time, which never waits for mortals, has been rolling on. Mellie Brown has been home and spent her vacation, but returned again to school. It was near the close of her second year, she wrote the following letter:

"MY DEAR MOTHER: - I receive your kind letter last week, which I found exceedingly interesting. As the sessions nears its close, I become more and more anxious to go home. I am wearied with study, and feel that my mind needs rest. I cannot relax my efforts now, for I am determined to do my best to be equal to any at the examination, so that if Papa and Buddie come they will have no cause to be ashamed of me. But there is one thing that I must tell you: I have at last found the 'pearl of great price;' I feel that I am in truth a new creature! Old things have passed away, and all things have become new. I now realize what it is to have the love of Christ in my soul, and feel His Spirit

bearing witness with mine that I am born from above, and adopted an heir of Heaven. The Bible says: 'We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren,' and I feel like I love everybody. I long to see you, that I may tell you all about it, and to get you to help me praise the Lord for His goodness. I can say, with David, 'Bless the Lord, O, my soul,' and with Job, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth.' Mamma, I feel so happy that I can scarcely be still while I write.

"You know that when I was home, I told you that I wanted to know for myself what it was to have the love of God in my soul, and you told me so many things which I never until now could understand. I see now that instead of being a believer in the Saviour before, I was only a self-righteous Pharisee, trusting in my own good deeds to save me. I was not depending on Christ to save me, a sinner, on account of His blood, but for my goodness. I thought I was good, and I was proud and vain enough to love to be praised for it. How like the proud Pharisee who loved the praise of men more than the praise of God! But I thought that God would be sure to save *me* anyhow. I remember that before I read my Bible, I thought that as I was a baptized child and in the church, I had nothing to fear; that all the calls to repentance were intended for others who were aliens from God and out of the church; but as I became older and read the Bible more, and understood it better, I found myself to be a vile sinner. Then I made another mistake just as bad, for I thought I would get very good, and that God would reward me with His favor. So I undertook to keep the law and be perfect in all my thoughts and actions; but I soon learned that this would not do. Now I see there was sin in the very thought. It was nothing less than base presumption in me, and was treating my Saviour with contempt to be trying to save myself after He had died to save me. After I had tried all other means and failed, I humbly prostrated myself at the foot of the cross, fully realizing that I was a justly condemned sinner, destitute of all merit of my own, and wholly dependent on God's mercy through Christ. I realized my helpless condition, and was anxious to be saved upon God's own terms - upon any terms, I could only say:

'Nothing in my hands I bring,  
Simply to Thy cross I cling.'

"For the first time in my life, I could say: 'Not my will, O Lord, but Thine be done.:' and just the moment that I surrendered every other hope, and fully trusted in the Lord, He spoke peace to my soul. I felt calm and delightful. My troubles were instantly gone, and all that was within me praised the Lord. Why, mamma, there was no miracle in this, not even a mystery in the *fact*. We know not how it is done, any more than we know how the wind blows, yet we know the effect, and it is no delusion. It is just as the Saviour promised: 'Come unto me, and I will give you rest.' Whenever we deny ourselves and trust in Christ, He is ready and willing to receive us, but He has never promised to receive us while we are trusting in ourselves or in something else. The way now looks so easy that it seems like I could tell everybody how to be Christians. Why, it's so plain - just to deny ourselves and *look* to Jesus. I had only to quit trying to save myself and be willing for the Lord to save me - that was all; and He will save every one, *if they will only be willing*.

"I intend, after getting home, to try to obey my Saviour by walking in obedience to all His commandments. He has said: 'If ye love me, keep my commandments;' and as an

evidence of my love to Him, I will take up my cross and follow Him. Let the world say what it may,

'I'm not ashamed to own my Lord,  
Nor to defend His cause;  
Maintain the honor of His word,  
The glory of His cross.'

"When I see you, I will have much more to tell you. Remember me in your prayers.

"Your affectionate daughter,

"MELLIE."

~ end of chapter 11 ~

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