

Regeneration in Baptism

Introduction

Baptism is an issue with a lot of different understandings. Already the expression "Regeneration in baptism" is a "red rag" for many Christians, even for those who call themselves "Lutheran". One of the most frequently asked question in the context of regeneration is: "When in baptism we get the regeneration, how it can be possible, that millions of baptized people live and die without God, do not care about faith, and live like all the others in flesh?"

This question shows a big misunderstanding of the meaning of regeneration and why it is necessary.

Hundred of books are written about baptism, thousands of people thought about regeneration. With this small consideration I will not clear all matters of dispute in Christianity. This essay is not fully complete in all facets according to this issue. It has to be seen as a basic for a discussion and maybe as a challenge for those, who never thought about the new born Jesus talk about with Nicodemus. May God bless these words for his glory.

I) The human being after his birth

- The bible tells us, that because of the fall of Adam, each man becomes a sinner already after his
- *„Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned;“* Romans 5,12
- The sin and the eternal death is inherited to the children from their parents
- *„Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.“* Ps. 51,5
- Although the child is bodily alive, it is for God and his Spirit „dead“ and not able to appeal to God.
- *„ And you has he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past all of you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. “* Ephesians 2, 1-3
- „By nature“ we are all “children of wrath“
- The bible calls this state „heathenism“ und the human being is called “heathen“
- *„ Wherefore remember, that all of you being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time all of you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:“* Eph. 2,11-12
- We were all after our birth aliens, without Christ and God, without hope

- The born human has no contact with his creator, but is under his eternal wrath. For God he is born dead.
- It does for God no matter, if the child is born from religious or believing parents.
- „*That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*“ John 3,6

Conclusion:

Each human being born into this world, without exception, is born in a lost state, as a sinner and is under the wrath of God.

He is not able to have contact with God, because God is holy and has no communion with a sinner. God calls this state “spiritual death”.

II) Baptism in the Old and New Testament

A) Baptism in the Old Testament

- Baptism was and is now a covenant of God with the human and not a covenant of the human with
- While God in the Old Testament made his covenant with his nation in the circumcision, now the baptism reflects the covenant with his nation in the New
- Though the circumcision of the Jews is a shadow of the baptism in the New Testament
- The Bible says in Colossians 2, 8-14:
„Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And all of you are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also all of you are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also all of you are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who has raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, has he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;“
- What does this bible chapter teach us?
 1. Baptism is here called as „the circumcision of Christ“.
 2. In Baptism the sinful body is crucified with Christ and we are buried with him by baptism into death. (Rom. 6)
 3. The circumcision of Christ is made without hands.
 4. In this chapter we can see the link between baptism and the circumcision
- The circumcision was the sign for the membership to the nation of God and was hold on the flesh.

- „ And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your seed after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto you, and to your seed after you.” Genesis 17,7

And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your seed after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto you, and to your seed after you. And all of you shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant between me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every male child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of your seed. V. 10-12

And the uncircumcised male child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant. V. 14

- An uncircumcised person had no right to see oneself as a member of Gods nation.
- He had no adoption, no glory, no covenant, no laws, no service of God and no promises. (Rom. 9, 4)
- An uncircumcised man was a heathen and had no contact to God (Eph. 2, 11-12)
- A heathen does not exist in the eyes of God, because he is dead in his sins (Eph. 2, 1-6)
- The first time God gave the circumcision to Abraham, as a seal of the righteousness of the faith.
 - a. „And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith,...“ Rom. 4,11
- It is important to emphasize that Abraham was circumcised because of his faith and his righteousness.
- God asked for the faith of Abraham before and then he got the circumcision as a seal
- But for his offspring it was the other way round. First comes the circumcision and then the faith has to follow.
- All male persons were circumcised on the 8th day after their birth
- After the circumcision the Jews were under the righteousness of their father Abraham, even without faith, until he became 20 years old. From that day he was responsible for his actions (Numbers 14,29 und 32,11) and faith was demanded by God (Hebrews 3,18-19).
- As an adult person the Jew could always refer to his circumcision. The point is that he did not rely on his own righteousness but on the righteousness of Abraham. The Jew was accepted by God only because of the righteousness of Abraham and his faith and because of the covenant made with Abraham.

Conclusion:

1. Not the origin from Israel defines if you are an Israeli with full rights or not, but only the circumcision.
2. Without circumcision each man is dead for God and their soul shall be cut off from his people.
3. Only Abraham had the testimony from God, that he was right. To all his children the righteousness was imputed.
4. The imputation was given before the child was able to believe, without any good actions or earnings, just as a present for an undamaged child.

B) Baptism in the New Testament

- The circumcision was a shadow in the Old Testament for the real covenant made by God with the human, namely the baptism
- God's covenant in baptism breaks through the curse, the human was bonded with directly after his birth.
- *„But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Christ, (by grace all of you are saved;) And has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: “ Eph. 2, 4-6*
- We all were dead und God made us alive with Jesus, he raised us up. We do not understand how he made that, but we just believe in God's word.
- Peter says: *„Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” 1. Petr. 1,3*
- In the German translation there is the word „regeneration“ in this verse. That means that the regeneration makes us able to have a lively hope. Without regeneration we have no chance to be saved.
- Jesus in person speaks in the important chapter 3 of the gospel of John: *„Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Joh. 3,3*
- This new birth is in the eyes of Jesus so important, that he says we cannot see the kingdom of God without it.
- Nicodemus is very surprised about the expression „born again“. He is confused about the words of Jesus and about the regeneration.
- Jesus talks about regeneration as something very naturally and as something he doesn't have to be surprised about.
- *„Bist Jesus answered and said unto him, Are you a master of Israel, and know not these things?“ Joh. 3, 10*
- Regeneration seem to be a very natural issue for a Jew, otherwise Jesus would not talk to him like this. It is not a new doctrine which Jesus teaches Nicodemus.
- Although the bible does not use the word „regeneration“ or „new born“ in the Old Testament, was the meaning of regeneration already in the Old Testament visible.
- Regeneration was preformed in the circumcision.
- In circumcision God made out of a heathen a child with promises and an heir to the blessings of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Without circumcision no one was allowed to be part of God's people.
- According to that, regeneration is a change of status, from the status of a „lost“ human to the status of communion with God.
- This change is fulfilled without any influence of man and is not an act of man. Jesus says: *„Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Joh. 3, 5*
- Regeneration is fulfilled by water and Spirit. Both elements are only combined in baptism. During baptism we can see water as a visible element and the invisible Spirit, who performs the regeneration of the human being. What is born of the Spirit, that is Spirit, says Jesus. But in the same time is neither the actual regeneration nor the effect of it immediately visible.

- It is important to point out, that not water has such power, but the promise in God's word in combination with water affects such great things.
- What cleaned Naaman from his leper? Did the water of the Jordan clean him? Was it the water or the promise of the prophet Elisha? No doubt, only faith in God's word can fulfill such great effects. Naaman did, what the prophete told him to do. Although Naaman could not understand how the water of the Jordan could heal him and he did not obey immediantly, the promise of God was stable.
- Also Titus tells us about a cleaning bath or a washing: *„But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit;“* Titus 3, 4-5
- The blessedness is given us as a present through regeneration and the donation of the Holy Spirit .
- God is not able to have a communion with a sinner. Therefore God cleanses his creation in baptism, forgives him his inherited sins and gives him his Holy Spirit.
- *„Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and all of you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are far off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call. “* Acts 2, 38-39
- Very clearly Peter says that in baptism we get the gift of the Holy Spirit and forgiveness of all sins.

Conclusion:

1. Regeneration is not a new birth in flesh like Nicodemus thought.
2. Regeneration does not mean that the human is after this act automatically a human like God wants him to be. Regeneration gives us the requirements for a communion with God, namely the adoption and the state the human being had before the fall of Adam and Eve in sin.
3. Baptism and regeneration do not save the human without faith in all promises God lays in the baptism.
4. Baptism requires a life in sanctification. Without that we would show, that we do not believe in our baptism, like millions of baptized people.