

Regeneration: The Way Leading to it

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1. Introduction

In the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ many biblical expressions are used, all dealing with the way through which a mortal sinner can receive eternal life. They speak of conversion, reconciliation, faith, mercy, justification, deliverance and redemption. A word that is seldomly used, but which is so very important because it essentially points out what it is all about, is 'regeneration'. On the next pages we would like to occupy ourselves with what the Bible means by regeneration.

The first phase of such an investigation requires the study of the linguistic meaning of the word 'regeneration' itself, for only then can the exact Biblical content of this term be explored. Those readers who are not interested in the linguistic essay can skip this first part and begin to read from "The necessity of regeneration", without missing anything essential. Nevertheless, we commence with a study of the word 'regeneration' because in our opinion this is the only correct method for such a study. The New King James Version is used, unless mentioned otherwise.

2. The word 'regeneration'

Although the concept of regeneration is present throughout the Bible, and in a sense is even the central subject of Scripture, the word itself is only used six times. On other occasions, different descriptions are used to define 'regeneration', for example: 'to be born of God', 'born of the Spirit' or 'born of Him'.

We find 'regeneration' in Matthew 19 : 28 and Titus 3 : 5 as the translation of the Greek noun 'paligenesia'. 'To be born again' (or 'to be begotten again') appears in 1 Peter 1 : 3 and 23 as the translation of the verb 'ana-gennao'. In John 3 : 3 and 7 it is the translation of 'gennao-another'. For the sake of clarity a summary:

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|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| (re)generation | = (pali)genesia | Mat. 19 : 28; Titus 3 : 5 |
| being born (again) | = (ana)gennao | 1 Peter 1 : 3 and 23 |
| to be born (again) | = gennao(another) | John 3 : 3 and 7 |

The verb 'gennao' which is obviously the basic form of these expressions and from which the noun 'genesia' was derived, has a much broader meaning than 'to

be born'. In general it means 'to make' or 'to create', thus: 'to produce'. In all cases 'gennao' can satisfactorily be translated with 'to beget', so that it is in fact the most correct translation. Thus 'gennao' is 'to beget', but it does not explain the manner in which is begotten. Whether it is related to handmade production or to sexual generation (reproduction), only becomes obvious from the context. When it is related to reproduction (a person is begotten) and the begetter is a woman, then 'gennao' is translated as 'to bear' (e. g. Luke 1 : 13). On the other hand, if in the same case the begetter is a man, then 'gennao' is translated as 'to beget' (e.g. Matthew 1 : 2 etc.).

These two possibilities also explicitly stand out in the conversation between the Lord and Nicodemus. When the Lord speaks of being born again, Nicodemus conceives it as a female activity. "Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born (gennao)?" But the answer that he receives is: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." Here the Lord did not have a female activity in mind, but a male one: to be born of the Spirit. 'Spirit' is by definition always male. What is more, all doubt disappears when we realize that here it speaks about the Spirit of God, which can hardly be called female. Strictly speaking 'gennao' should have been translated with 'to beget', but then it would have been incomprehensible why Nicodemus thought of the mother instead of the father.

Thus 'gennao' can be translated both as 'to beget' and 'to bear', because it is connected to the whole process of the creation of man, from the impregnation up to and including the delivery. If this is true for the natural birth, then it certainly applies to regeneration, in which also a 'male' and a 'female' part can be distinguished.

As we have seen, the Bible uses three different adverbs to express that this birth is a second birth. The first one is the prefix 'pali' which is derived from 'palin'. This word expresses repetition of a movement, but also a contrast. That is why it can be translated as 'again', but often also as 'on the other hand/on the contrary'. So when the Bible uses the word 'paligenesia', it is about the recurrence of a birth, but it also expresses that this second birth is different from the first. As we shall see, this difference is determined because the parents at the second birth are others than those at the first birth, from which follows that also what appears

second in the world is fundamentally different from that which is born first. "However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual." (1 Corinthians 15 : 46) This in itself is a principle that we find in the whole Bible. It has everything to do with the many issues concerning the right of the firstborn that was repeatedly given to the second instead of to the first. Whenever this occurs in the Bible, it points to this principle, which finds its fulfilment in regeneration; not the natural, which is born first, receives the right of the firstborn, but the second, which is spiritual and is produced by regeneration.

Thus 'paligenesia' is the repetition of a birth and it is correctly translated as 'regeneration'. Purely linguistically there is no need whatsoever to use any other expression for the same phenomenon. The fact that the Bible nevertheless uses two different adverbs in this context can only mean that these two adverbs explicitly clarify the character of regeneration. The best known of these two expressions is 'anohen', which the Lord Jesus uses in His conversation with Nicodemus in John 3. For the sake of distinction it is translated there as 'again'. Yet this is a very superficial translation. We find the most correct one in John 19 : 11: "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you 'from above'." Here 'anohen' is translated as 'from above', and it is apparent in this verse that this 'above' is heaven and metaphorically is God Himself: "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you 'from God'." So 'anohen' is not just 'again', not just a simple repetition, but it also shows the higher level of repetition.

It also has that meaning in Luke 1 : 3: "[...] having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first [...]" Luke had indeed examined the history of the Lord Jesus 'again' and 'from the very first'. It was 'again' because he was not the first who did this and it was 'from the very first' because of all evangelists he emphasizes most the history of the human birth of the Saviour. But above all here 'anohen' points out the origin and source of his inquiries: the Holy Spirit or God Himself. The gospel of Luke has rightly found a place among the canonical books of the New Testament, because it is inspired and begotten (gennaos) by the Spirit of God. 'Anohen' in connection with regeneration does not only point out a repetition of an earlier event, but also the origin of that repetition. It shows the Begetter of that which is born: the Holy Spirit. Obviously this is confirmed in the

further conversation with Nicodemus. In the verses 5, 6 and 8 the Lord explains that this 'gennao-another' is a being born of the Spirit.

The third adverb that is used by Peter is 'ana', which is mostly translated as 'again'. But this is also a poor translation. 'Ana' not only states a repetition, but also a direction: 'upwards'. The upwards-directed movement in this word is so strong that 'ana' is even used as a command in the sense of 'rise up'. 'Again' or 'once more' are reasonably good translations. We can paint something again or paint it over, so that the new coat of paint covers the old one. That new coat lies on a higher level than the old one. Peter confirms the rising movement of 'ana' when he connects 'ana-gennao' directly to the resurrection of Christ (1 Peter 1 : 3), and so does the Lord Jesus, who mentions regeneration the only way to enter the kingdom of God (John 3 : 5).

Summarizing we come to the following conclusions:

1. Regeneration is not just a being born again, but points to the whole process of the creation of man, from the begetting up to the delivery (gennao).
2. It is something that happens again (palin), but then
3. with a different, namely Divine origin (another) and
4. with a different, namely heavenly destination (ana).

Especially these last two points distinguish regeneration from the natural birth. A natural birth has a natural or fleshly cause: the parents; and a natural or fleshly destination: death. Regeneration has a Divine or Spiritual destination: eternal life in the kingdom of God. (John 3 : 5)

3. The necessity of regeneration

When the Lord speaks to Nicodemus about regeneration, He says that regeneration is necessary to be able to enter the kingdom of God. "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3 : 3) After Nicodemus, the

teacher of Israel, has shown his ignorance concerning this subject, the Lord Jesus explains it and says: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3 : 5) Therefore, the kingdom of God is not accessible to someone who has only been born once. By nature every man is only born once and is therefore absolutely incapable to enter that kingdom. Consequently, every human striving to be reconciled with God is doomed to fail. All human attempts, however pious or religious, to inherit or even establish that kingdom, are, according to the words of the Lord, in vain. There is only one way this can be achieved: one must be regenerated. However this is interpreted, regeneration is not something that you can bring about yourself. Just as one has no control over his first, natural birth, one cannot bring about his regeneration. Of course regeneration is an activity, but not of the one who is born, but of Him who begets. The nature we received by birth is unable to enter the kingdom of God, but is also unable to change or improve itself in such a manner that it would become suitable as yet for that purpose. The Bible is very explicit about the fact that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Corinthians 15 : 50) Everyone who is born only once is flesh and blood. These passages of Scripture are not about the conduct of a human being, or about his merits, but about who and what he is by nature because of his birth. It is crucial that not his deeds, but his nature make a person suitable or unsuitable for that kingdom. It is typical that those people who stress the practise of strict and religious regiments, are very much aware of the fact that all these good deeds do not reconcile them with God. In spite of all those 'good' deeds, they are flesh and blood and remain sinners with no right to anything else but eternal damnation, without fellowship with God. "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight." (Romans 3 : 20) For "cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." (Galatians 3 : 10)

However hard we may try to improve ourselves by observing certain behaviour, we remain flesh and blood and "those who are in the flesh cannot please God." (Romans 8 : 8) We would do better to concern ourselves with our salvation, instead of keeping ourselves busy with all sorts of strict ordinances. "These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh." (Colossians 2 : 23) The fulfilling of certain regiments may satisfy man himself - al-

though I doubt that this is ever the case - but mostly it leads to the opposite; for the purpose of our salvation it has no significance at all. Persons who lead a rigid life "set their minds on the things of the flesh" and "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be." (Romans 8 : 5, 7) "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight." (Romans 3 : 20; Galatians 2 : 16)

The shortcoming however, lies not in the law, but in the nature of man, who was put under the law. "Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. [...] For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin." (Romans 7 : 12, 14) The law says: Do this, and you shall live. But this task is given to people who are born only once, and are not able 'to do this'. "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice." (Romans 7 : 18, 19) That is not only Paul's confession, the man who had lived so many years under the law before his conversion; it is also the short biography of every man. What is more: It is a law of nature, an iron law, to which the entire old nature – that also we have received at birth - is subject. "I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good." (Romans 7 : 21) Everyone who places himself under a law will honestly have to confirm the correctness of this principle, and say together with Paul: "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7 : 24) Because that is what is necessary: We must be freed from our old nature and in its place receive a new one which is not subject to this "law of sin and death," but to "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8 : 2) The only way to obtain this is through regeneration. "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

4. The origin of sin

According to the Bible, the major failure lies not in the behaviour of man or in the law of God, but in the nature of man. In order to be saved it is necessary that man is somehow delivered from that carnal nature. The question of how he can be delivered from his old nature leads to the question of where the old nature originated from.

We have already seen that in the Bible human nature is called 'flesh'. In His conversation with Nicodemus about regeneration, the Lord says that flesh is born of the flesh. (John 3 : 6) Flesh is begotten (gennao) by the flesh. We have inherited our old nature from our parents who, in turn, inherited their old nature from their parents etc. This leads all the way back to the common ancestor of all men, Adam; for God "has made from one blood every nation of men." (Acts 17 : 26) By birth we have ultimately inherited our carnal nature from Adam. "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." (Romans 5 : 12) This one man, the begetter of the entire human race, was the one who introduced sin into the world, and with that also the result of sin: death. "For the wages of sin is death." (Romans 6 : 23) The fact that all men are sinners through their descent from Adam is confirmed many times in Romans 5 : 12-21:

"[...] if by the one man's offense many died [...]"

"[...] which came through the one who sinned [...]"

"[...] the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation [...]"

"[...] if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one [...]"

"[...] as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation [...]"

"[...] as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners [...]"

Life of the human race, the millions who descended from Adam, became already corroded at the source and this infected every individual even before birth. That is why humanity is described as 'sons of disobedience'. (Ephesians 2 : 2) So we are hereditarily tainted by sin, for the simple reason that we were 'in Adam' when he became a sinner by one offence: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." (Romans 5 : 12)

The concept that someone is an accessory to an act of their ancestors may surprise us. But this principle is confirmed in the Bible. According to Hebrews 7, Levi had given tithes to Melchizedek while, historically, it was his great-grandfather Abraham who paid this honour to the priest and king of Salem. But Scripture says that Levi had also given his tithes "for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him." (Hebrews 7 : 9, 10) In the same way we were an accessory to the offence of Adam, because we were still in his loins when he sinned.

The meaning of these verses is generally poorly understood. Often people think that they are sinners because they sin. Of course it is true that someone who sins, is therefore a sinner. However, we did not commit our first sin in our childhood, but when we were still in Adam. The result is that we were born sinners. Because of this we are virtually not free to choose, for we have no choice but to sin. What makes us sinners are not our personal sins - for they are the result and not the cause - but our Adamic origin. Our bad behaviour does not make us children of Adam, and our good behaviour, if this were even possible, does not make us children of God. So a man sins because he is a sinner, it is certainly not the other way around.

5. Sin and flesh

Thus from Adam we received both our 'flesh' and sin. Often the impression exists that these two are identical, because the Bible often connects the terms 'flesh' and 'sin'. This connection proves the close relationship that exists between both concepts, but does not make them identical. Flesh indicates human nature, which Adam originally received. Sin could be defined as the incurable illness, with which that flesh has been infected. The flesh in itself is a creation of God, and can hardly be called bad. By the 'one offence' of Adam, however, the flesh was infected with an 'illness', which the Bible calls 'sin' and which irrevocably results in death. When the Bible defines flesh as sinful, it is the description of the situation in which natural man finds himself.

A fitting analogy would be to compare humanity with a tree, where Adam is the root and his descendants are represented by the trunk and branches, the leaves and fruits. This 'family tree' in its totality is 'flesh'. But this tree is seriously ill,

because a parasite has not only nestled itself in its roots, but also the trunk and everything that springs from it have become infected. Obviously this tree and its illness are not identical. Flesh is by definition not the same as sin, but they are strongly connected in the way that the flesh is subject to and a slave of sin. The ill tree is absolutely unable to produce healthy fruits, however much it wishes to. In the same manner man, the flesh, is not able to do good. "They have all turned aside; they have together (not individually, but collectively: in Adam) become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one." (Romans 3 : 12). In the same way, we are also slaves of sin, which rules over us and unstoppably leads us to death.

"For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one."
(Romans 5 : 17)

"Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, [...] of sin leading to death [...]"
(Romans 6 : 16)

"[...] But I am carnal (flesh), sold under sin." (Romans 7 : 14)

"[...] So then, [...] I myself serve [...] with the flesh the law of sin." (Romans 7 : 25)

"[...] For to be carnally minded is death [...]" (Romans 8 : 6)

"[...] whoever commits sin is a slave of sin." (John 8 : 34)

"For if you live according to the flesh you will die [...]" (Romans 8 : 13)

Flesh and sin therefore belong together, because sin has, as it were, nestled itself in the flesh, but they are not identical. In fact the Bible recognizes Someone who was flesh and therefore had a human nature, but who was not subject to sin. He is called 'the last Adam' or 'the second Man', and He is 'the Lord from heaven'. (1 Corinthians 15 : 45, 47) The Saviour had received a human nature through His mother, and indeed He prefers to call Himself 'Son of man', that is the Son of the

man Adam. That His human nature is also defined as 'flesh' is apparent from many Bible verses:

"[...] and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." (John 6 : 51).

"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us [...]" (John 1 : 14)

"[...] who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh." (Romans 1 : 3)

"[...] God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh [...]" (Romans 8 : 3)

"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same [...]" (Hebrews 2 : 14)

By His incarnation Christ obtained a real carnal nature. He did not only come unto His own, but He also came in equality to their own flesh. Naturally we must observe here the difference between a carnal nature and a sinful nature. Christ had a carnal nature, just as we have, with the distinction that our flesh is infected by sin, while His flesh was without sin. For we have a High Priest who "[...] was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4 : 15) "In Him there is no sin." (1 John 3 : 5)

Furthermore this brings us to the conclusion that the human (carnal) nature is probably inherited from both parents, while sin is inherited exclusively via the male side. The Lord Jesus was born of a woman, from whom He inherited His human nature, but nevertheless He was without sin. Thus what He lacked, as compared to us, were two things: a biological father and sin. From this it may be concluded that the absence of the father is the cause of the absence of sin: not the mother but only the father plays a role in the propagation of sin and with it death. This is confirmed in some verses that speak of the origin of sin in humanity. Eve was the first human being who sinned and so she became a sinner; however, not she, but Adam is indicated as the person responsible for the sin which 'spread

to all men'. Although all people also descended from Eve, they are not sinners 'in Eve', but 'in Adam'. This law of nature, that sin is inherited from the father, probably lies at the root of the Redeemer's birth of a virgin. For if Christ had been born of the seed of Joseph, just like any other man, He would have become tainted with sin, and thus He would have been 'deserving of death'. If that had been the case, He would not have been able to die for our sins, but He would have had to die for His own sins. That is why in the first biblical prophecy concerning the coming of the Saviour of the world, immediately after the Fall, it does not speak of the seed of a man, but of the Seed of the woman. (See Genesis 3 : 15) Those who do not believe in the virgin birth of Jesus should therefore, as a logical consequence, not believe in His conciliatory death either. He would have been totally unsuitable for that task.

The fact that the Lord Jesus had a carnal nature that was not infected by sin, implies that naturally His flesh was not mortal either. According to God's Word, death is the result of sin, and so death had by nature no power over the Saviour. That He died in spite of that was because He was made to be sin for the world. He voluntarily took the sin of the world on Himself, and, as a consequence of this, voluntarily laid down His life. His own words confirm this:

“Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.” (John 10 : 17, 18)

With a natural father, He would have been subject to the principle that life that is received, will be taken, robbed even; but from His heavenly Father He received the principle (command) that He was not subject to death, but that death was subjected to Him. His heavenly Father loved Him for the very reason that He voluntarily used this opportunity of laying down life. The apostle Paul agrees with these words of the Lord when he says: "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." (Philippians 2 : 8) Also after He had taken the form of a man, He humbled Himself by subjecting Himself to death, in obedience to His Father. This was not a result of His manhood, but of a further humiliation as the obedi-

ent 'Servant of the Lord'. "[...] By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great [...], because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." (Isaiah 53 : 11, 12) "The Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for (= anti = instead of) many." (Matthew 20 : 28) His life was not taken from Him; He gave His life. At a moment, when by nature death could not have occurred yet, He bowed His head, and gave up the spirit (John 19 : 30).

6. Sin and sins

So sin and flesh are not identical, but they are hereditarily connected to each other and because of this connection, flesh is mortal. "The wages of sin is death." Mind you: death is not the result of sins but of sin. The tree does not die because its fruits are ill, but because it is ill itself. This brings us to the important distinction the Bible makes between sin and sins. This distinction is not a matter of numbers or of singular and plural, it is much more than that. Sin has to do with the nature of every man. Sins, by contrast, are the wrong deeds of a human being. They are strictly connected to his person. Up to now we have not yet spoken of sins, the sinful deeds of a man, but only of sin, the evil nature or character of the carnal man. If we now apply the image of the ill tree to the individual, the tree itself represents the sinner, while the ill fruits represent the sins, the deeds of the sinner. The death of a sinner is not the result of the sins that he certainly committed and for which he is personally responsible, but it is the consequence of his nature that he inherited from Adam. The tree dies of its illness, not of its fruits. In the same manner a sinner dies of his sin, not of his sins. The 'one offence' of Adam is responsible for the power that death exercises over his entire posterity. The evidence for this thesis is given by the fact that innocent children who have never committed sins, and also others who for one reason or another cannot be held responsible for their deeds, are just as mortal as the worst criminal. "Nevertheless death reigned [...] even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam [...]." (Romans 5 : 14) Thus death is not the result of the deeds, but of the nature of man.

"[...] through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin [...]"
(Romans 5 : 12)

"[...] as sin has reigned in death [...]" (Romans 5 : 21)

"[...] you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, [...]" (Romans 6 : 16)

"For the wages of sin is death [...]" (Romans 6 : 23)

"The sting of death is sin [...]" (1 Corinthians 15 : 56)

"For sin [...] deceived me, and by it killed me." (Romans 7 : 11)

"But sin [...] was producing death in me [...]" (Romans 7 : 13)

Thus death and sin are connected. Paul also confirms this when he speaks of the death of the Lord Jesus: "For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all [...]" (Romans 6 : 10) But sins have their 'wages', too. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men [...]" (Romans 1 : 18)

"But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who 'will render to each one according to his deeds.'" (Romans 2 : 5, 6)

During his life man collects an amount of debt, which is proportional to and the result of his deeds, his sins. This debt therefore expands as he becomes older and/or as he sins more. So, in view of eternity, the Old Testamental death penalty is not as harsh as it may seem at first. For when someone has died, he is not able to increase his debt to God by committing more sins, is he? But everyone will have to justify himself before God for the accumulated debt "in the day of [...]" revelation of the righteous judgment of God." (Romans 2 : 5, 6) This 'day' is described in Revelation 20:

“And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.” (Revelation 20 : 12, 13)

God judges every man according to his works. These are apparently recorded in the Divine bookkeeping during his lifetime. A full awareness of what this means, would drive one almost crazy. An account is held of all sins that someone commits during his lifetime, while he is not able to do anything else but sin; and that account will be used against him during the trial that is awaiting him. The penalty for the sins is not carried out during this life though, as some occasionally seem to think, but only after this judgment before the 'great white throne'.

According to the Bible, the future of an unregenerated man is in the first instance death, as the result of sin; in the second instance the righteous judgment of God over the sins, the works, which were done by the sinner. "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment." (Hebrews 9 : 27) Many seem to think that this will not turn out all bad for them, because in their own eyes they have led a good and maybe even a Christian life. But their opinion in this matter is totally irrelevant. God's verdict is that there is absolutely no goodness in mankind (Romans 3 : 10-18). What awaits every sinner is the lake of fire, as the place where the sentence over his sins will be carried out. "And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. [...] this is the second death." (Revelation 20 : 15, 14) These are the future prospects for every living human being. Let us not have any illusions about our natural position in regard to God. That position is absolutely hopeless on account of the two things that have broken our relationship with God: our sin and our sins. A righteous God will pass His righteous judgment on both. When we are fully aware of the power of sin in our mortal body, we are also aware of the fact that there is nothing good in store for us from a righteous God. "For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Hebrews 10 : 30, 31).

7. The redeemer

However, God is not only righteous. In spite of our wrongdoing, He loves us. It speaks for itself that God's love for the sinner is neither aroused nor stimulated by the sinner himself. God loves us, because He Himself is love, "for God is love" (1 John 4 : 8), and also because we are "the work of His hands". We are His creation. Undoubtedly we take the first step in the right direction when we become convinced of the fact that by nature all humanity is lost. Humanity is lost, but whose loss is that; who has lost humanity? Who was its owner? Our thoughts are mostly directed towards ourselves. When we say that we are lost, we normally think about the consequences of this fact for our own person. However, we are not lost for ourselves, but for God. When property is lost, it is in the first place a loss for the owner; and when it is found, it is joyous for the owner. That is also the scope of the parables about the 'lost sheep', 'the lost coin' and 'the lost son' in Luke 15.

"I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents [...]." (Luke 15 : 7)

"Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (Luke 15 : 10)

"It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found." (Luke 15 : 32)

We are not our own property, but as creatures we are the property of our Creator. That is why it is first of all God's business to foresee in the reconciliation of a sinful humanity, and that His Son "is come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19 : 10; Matthew 18 : 11) Psalm 69 describes the suffering of the Lord Jesus as the way to salvation. In verse four we read: "Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; they are mighty who would destroy me, being my enemies wrongfully; though I have stolen nothing, I still must restore it." What had He not stolen, and what did He have to restore? Undoubtedly this concerns the possession that was stolen from God by sin and that was returned to Him by the work of salvation of the Lord Jesus. This is the Divine aspect of reconciliation. Not the creature, but the Creator is central in the work of redemp-

tion by Christ. At first glance this work of redemption has a twofold aim: It must provide a solution for sins and it must provide a solution for sin.

8. The redemption from sins

Regarding sins we have seen that they will be judged by means of the books before 'the great white throne' of God. The penalty of sins is wrath. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." (Romans 1 : 18) "But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath [...]." (Romans 2 : 5) "[...] and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3 : 36) Of this wrath of God it is not said that it is revealed by the Gospel, but 'from heaven'. The wrath of God is not a part of the Gospel, for it is certainly not good news. Furthermore, the coming judgment is definitely not popular and that is probably why you hear so little about it in today's preaching. In these days, which are ruled by democratic principles, the preaching is usually more in agreement with the 'will of the people' than with the will of God. Nowadays one hears more about what man does, and about what he, in his own opinion, should be doing, than about what God has done, and about what He will do. God will pass judgment over the sins of every man and carry it into effect. What God has done in the past is create the possibility to escape from that righteous judgment. He has poured the wrath, which should have come upon us, over Him who chose to stand in our place. God's own Son bore the penalty that has brought us peace.

“Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows [...]. He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.” (Isaiah 53 : 4, 5)

Striking in this part of Scripture is the fact that all things for which the Lord suffered, are written in plural. Thus, it is not about sin, our nature, but about sins. It speaks of griefs, sorrows, transgressions and iniquities. The sufferings of Christ (1 Peter 1 : 11) were the result of our sins, which He bore in His own body on the tree. This suffering was the result of God's wrath that was poured over our sins and that the Lord, in our place, had taken on Himself. Here we do not speak of the

dying of the Saviour, but of the suffering that preceded it. Death is the result of sin. Suffering is the result of sins. The suffering of Christ is always connected to sins, while His death is connected to sin.

“Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree [...]” (1 Peter 2 : 24)

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God [...]” (1 Peter 3 : 18)

“So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.” (Hebrews 9 : 28)

“Who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.” (Romans 4 : 25)

“[...] and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name [...]” (Luke 24 : 46, 47)

It is striking that the last two verses speak of sins and suffering, but not of sin and dying. Here, too, a distinction is made between these essentially different matters. The suffering of Christ is therefore the means by which God was able to forgive our sins. Consequently, He went through this suffering not as a Servant of men, but as a Servant of God. In Isaiah 52 and 53, where this suffering is described, God calls Him "My Servant" (Isaiah 52 : 13) and "My righteous Servant". (Isaiah 53 : 11) Sins must be punished righteously and of a God who is righteous we should surely expect that He will do so. However, righteousness excludes forgiveness. A judge must be righteous and that is why we do not expect him to forgive the accused. The fact that our righteous God and Judge is able to grant us forgiveness in spite of this, is because the penalty for our sins has already been taken and borne by the Lord Jesus, so "that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." (Romans 3 : 26) The wonderful result of this is: "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin." (Romans 4 : 7, 8; Psalms 32 : 1)

9. The redemption from sin

The wrath over our sins has thus already been borne by the Lord Jesus, but that is not the end of it. Our sins have been forgiven, but how can we be set free from sin? The consequences of the illness have been taken away, but that does not make us healthy. Even when all the symptoms of a disease have been suppressed, the patient is not yet cured. Principally, the Bible knows of only one way to be justified from sin; that is to die. That sounds harsh, but death is the only way to be delivered from an incurable disease. Do we not often say: "It is better this way," when someone has died after a lengthy period of suffering? Death is not only the result of sin, but it also puts an end to it. The verses we quoted to show that death is the result of sin also declare that death is the end of sin.

"[...] as sin reigned in death [...]" (Romans 5 : 21)

"Do you not know that [...] you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death [...]" (Romans 6 : 16)

"For when you were slaves of sin, [...] the end of those things is death."
(Romans 6 : 20, 21)

"For he who has died has been freed from sin." (Romans 6 : 7)

This given fact, that someone who died is justified from sin, explains why man in the future judgment only has to render an account of his sins. He only has to face his deeds and their result; he has laid down his sinful nature together with his carnal body. What is more, it is the foundation of the salvation of all children that died before they committed sins and of all those who for other reasons cannot be held responsible for their deeds. They lost their sinful nature when they died, and they have not done any deeds by which they could be convicted. In itself this is of course a positive note, but it does not alter the fact that during our earthly life we would be weighed down by the slavery of sin of which we could not be redeemed till the day we die. In that way living humanity is still lost for God, even if every individual has received forgiveness for his sins. In spite of that forgiveness, he remains a man of flesh and blood, who is infected by sin and therefore unfit for the kingdom of

God. For "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God [...]." (1 Corinthians 15 : 50) Superficially, it seems that we must be redeemed from our sin by death, which, by doing so, becomes our friend. Nevertheless, according to 1 Corinthians 15 : 26 death is our enemy, because it ends the life which was originally created by God. Death is not one of God's creations; it brings His creations to an end. Death is the final enemy and certainly not a friend. All our feelings and experiences will confirm this.

The tragedy of death is that it brings our life to an end at the very moment our life might have become meaningful, and might have begun to live up to the expectations that God had in mind for all human life. When our sins have been forgiven by the suffering of the Lord, and our sinful nature has been taken away by our death, we would then be in the same position as Adam was when he was created by God: innocent; with this great distinction, that Adam from that moment forth began to live and we just then stopped living. It is not very difficult to understand that Adam's existence would have been totally meaningless if he were to have been taken away by God on the day of his creation. We find ourselves in the same position when our sins are forgiven and our sin by death has disappeared; at that moment we no longer have a life ahead of us and our earthly existence has turned out to be totally meaningless, while the costs were extremely high: the suffering of Christ for our sins. "Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." (1 Peter 1 : 18, 19) If that had been the case, our earthly life would have been a lost life, without the slightest fruit or yield, but at an extremely high price. Indeed Satan would have succeeded in snatching away God's creation from His power and in destroying it. The power of the final enemy is that strong: it makes a valuable existence impossible for us. But also this loss is God's loss. That is why it is God Himself who does not only solve the problem of the sins, but also the problem of sin.

Wrath is the penalty for the sins; it was borne for us by the Lord Jesus. Death is the 'wages of sin', and also that the Lord endured for us. His suffering relates to what we were like, while His death relates to who we were: "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for

us." (Romans 5 : 6, 8) After the Lord had suffered for our sins, He still had to die for our sin, which He took upon Himself as well. His suffering brought us forgiveness of sins, but His death brought us reconciliation with God. "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son [...]." (Romans 5 : 10) "For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all [...]." (Romans 6 : 10)

10. The redemption from sin and from the law

Thus, we were delivered from sin, because He died in our place. But not only that; by this we were also delivered from the law, because the law was imposed on the old, sinful nature. If Christ died for our sinful nature, it means that we are delivered from that sinful nature, but also from everything to which that nature was subjected. "Or do you not know, brethren [...] that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?" (Romans 7 : 1) This is easily explained by the fact that it is just not possible to forbid a dead man to drive through a red light. Nothing at all can be expected of a dead man any more. Sin and law only have dominion over a living being, not over a deceased.

A Biblical illustration (in fact it is much more than that!) of this principle can be found in Romans 7 : 2: "For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband." In God's eyes, the penalty that Jesus bore for our sins freed us from that penalty, as if we ourselves had borne it. The death that Christ endured for our sin freed us from death, as if we ourselves had endured it. This is also confirmed by God's Word when it says that "[...] if One died for all, then all died." (2 Corinthians 5 : 14) If Christ died for us, then we died ourselves. And not only that; Paul considers the dying of Christ and the dying of a sinner as being identical, as having taken place at the same time. "For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." (Galatians 2 : 19, 20)

God sees us united with Christ. "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?" (Romans 6 : 3) Not the baptism in water is the issue here, but the baptism in Christ, and the baptism in His death. We are baptized in Christ and so we are baptized in His Person, and by this we

have been 'united together'. (Romans 6 : 5) If we are united with Him in this way, we have died together with Him and we have been baptized in His death. So His death is considered to be our death as well. For us mortal beings this may be hard to accept; but in the first place it is important whether God accepts this and He certainly does. If God Himself says that we have died with Christ, why would we not accept it either? Then we know together with the apostle Paul "[...] that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin." (Romans 6 : 6, 7) "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin [...]" (Romans 6 : 11)

So we have been delivered from sin because the death of Christ is reckoned to be our death; and when we are dead to sin, no law can be laid upon us, because "[...] the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives." (Romans 7 : 1) When we are 'dead to sin' then we are also 'dead to the law'. "Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ," and "now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by." (Romans 7 : 4, 6) The Bible explicitly states that the law was laid on the flesh, the old, sinful nature, and because of that the law was powerless. The law was powerless because we were powerless. (See Romans 5 : 6; 8 : 3) That is why Hebrews 7 : 16 speaks of "the law of a fleshly commandment". But because of sin that flesh was unable to fulfil the law "for it (the carnal mind) is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be." (Romans 8 : 7) "For we know that the law is spiritual; but I (who am under the law) am carnal [...]" (Romans 7 : 14) But when the flesh has died, the law has nothing left to rule over. The slave is dead.

Apart from this, the Bible emphasizes that the law is only valid until Christ. In Galatians 3 we are confronted with the fact that God's covenant with Abraham had already been operative 430 years before the law was given. Abraham was justified by faith without the works of the law, simply because he lived many centuries before the coming of the law. (Compare Romans 4 : 3 to 3 : 28) Therefore, after he had been justified by God, he was unable to live according to the law 'out of gratitude'. This covenant with Abraham was made with 'Abraham and his Seed', whereby it is declared that this seed is no Other than Christ. When Paul explains this truth, he also gives a beautiful demonstration of how one should read the Bible to the letter: "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And

to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ." (Galatians 3 : 16) Furthermore, Paul states that these promises to Abraham and Christ were not withdrawn when God made the covenant of the law 430 years later on mount Sinai. "And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect." (Galatians 3 : 17)

In spite of the law (and apart from it) the promises to Abraham and Christ remain valid, and it remains true that faith is accounted as righteousness. "Even as Abraham 'believed God, and it was accounted to him as righteousness.'" (Galatians 3 : 6; Romans 4 : 3) "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed." (Romans 3 : 21) The law, which was given so many centuries later, does not add to or take away from the promises to Abraham and his Seed. The law is not a supplement to the promises, but has been placed apart from the promises. "What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come [...]" (Galatians 3 : 19) To what was the law added? Verse 18 explains that the law was added to, or set besides, the promises. The law has nothing to do with the promises, as becomes apparent in verse 15: "Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it." God has confirmed His covenant with Abraham and Christ beforehand (Galatians 3 : 17) and He will not add to it or annul it. "He remembers His covenant forever, [...] the covenant which He made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac, and confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant." (Psalms 105 : 8-10) It cannot be more evident: The covenant with Abraham and his Seed is an everlasting covenant.

The covenant of the law, however, is quite a different matter. Of the law, it is said that "it was added (to the covenant with Abraham: the promises) [...] till the Seed should come [...]" (Galatians 3 : 19) Here we find the word 'till'. The law thus only has temporal validity. This was already confirmed in the Old Testament, where a New Covenant was announced that would replace the old one. Scripture shows that this Old Covenant, that is to be replaced, and the covenant of the law, are one and the same: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah - not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by

the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord." (Jeremiah 31 : 31, 32) In the first place these verses prove that the covenant of the law had a temporary character and would be replaced, secondly that the Lord had entered into the bond of matrimony with Israel by the law. That is what Paul was thinking about when he stated: "Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?" (Romans 7 : 1) Because the law is only valid for the living, there are now two reasons why a believer cannot be under the law. The first reason follows in the second verse of this chapter: "For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband [...]." The first reason why today no one is placed under the law is the fact that the Husband, the Lord Jesus Christ, has died, which released the woman from that law; the woman being Israel, the people placed under that law. Paul mentions the second reason in verse four: "Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another [...]." Not only the Husband, the Lord, has died, but also the woman, representing us, possibly placed under the law, has died on account of the Body of Christ. Paul's argument in Romans 7 is that this marriage between the Lord and the people placed under the law is impossible to maintain, because both spouses have died in the meantime. "Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to (or until) Christ [...]," (Galatians 3 : 24) and not a day longer.

It is good to realize that the law itself, the 'ten commandments' as well as the ceremonial law, in all its facets, points to Christ. The offerings, the feasts, the special dates, the objects that were used in the temple-service, all are types of Christ. Even the 'neighbour', frequently mentioned in the law, is no Other than Christ Himself. When the law is summarized in this one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself", (Galatians 5 : 14) this Neighbour is no Other than the Lord Jesus, as He taught us Himself in the parable of the Good Samaritan. That this is hardly ever acknowledged does in no way change this fact. The whole law points to Christ. That is why Paul states that the law itself proclaims the righteousness, which is revealed apart from the law. (Romans 3 : 21) And when the Lord Himself explains His suffering and dying to the Emmaus disciples, He does this with the help of "Moses [...]" and all the Scriptures [...]" (Luke 24 : 27) And when after this He speaks to His disciples,

He says: "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses [...]" (Luke 24 : 44) So the Law of Moses did point to Christ and, since Christ has come in the meantime, the law has lost its function. Speaking about the law Paul says: "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law [...]" (Galatians 4 : 4, 5)

The law pointed to Christ and when He came, He redeemed all who were under the law from that same law. He redeemed us from the law (Galatians 4 : 5) and from the curse of the law: "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law [...]" (Galatians 3 : 13)

According to these parts of Scripture we are redeemed from sin and redeemed from the law. No believer would ever come up with the idea to voluntarily live in sin, from which he has been redeemed, out of gratitude. Why then do people come up with this idea in relation to the law? Have they been blinded, just as legalistic Israel? Freedom from the slavery of the law is an essential part of the total redemption, which is in Christ Jesus. When someone who calls himself a Christian, places himself deliberately under that law, he is deliberately detrimental to Christ's work of redemption, and "then Christ died in vain." (Says Paul in the same context in Galatians 2 : 21) Furthermore, he places himself under the same curse as the people who were formerly placed under the law, and he will, just as that same people of Israel, be unable to receive the spiritual blessings that are in Christ. (Ephesians 1 : 3) We would like to say to such people: "Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved [...]", (Acts 15 : 10, 11) for we are not under the law, but under grace. (Romans 6 : 14, 15)

After Paul has explained in Romans 7 why and how a believer is redeemed from the law, in Romans 8 he follows with his great hymn of praise to God. That chapter starts with: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." The New International Version (NIV) justly omits the following sentence: "who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." Fortunately, the latter does not occur in the best original Greek texts. Not our manner of living

defines our destination, but our position in Christ Jesus. That position is: free of sins, free of sin and free of the law. Everyone who believes to have been freed of these three things in Christ, will agree with Paul on this verse with all his heart. But we have never met a person who placed himself under the law and at the same time was convinced that there was no condemnation for him anymore. This also proves that the law has become a curse: (Galatians 3 : 13) It makes it impossible for a person to fully accept the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, and to live accordingly. Let us learn to accept that our Lord Jesus Christ has also redeemed us from the law, of which we were slaves, "having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." (Colossians 2 : 14) Only then can we exclaim with all our heart: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8 : 1)

11. Resurrection

Up to now we have seen that the Lord Jesus suffered and died in our place for our sins and for our sin respectively. The suffering that He endured was in our place and for our sins; His death was also in our place and for our sin. But that cannot be the whole story. When we apply the death of Christ to ourselves, we become aware of the fact that we have been redeemed from sin and the law, but it also means that our lives are lost for God. Together with our sin we also lost our life, as we inherited it from Adam. The illness of the tree has been removed, but the tree itself is dead. That is like saying: "The operation was a success, but the patient died." At the end nothing is solved. Originally God created man still uninfected by sin. Surely He must have had a purpose for that, as the Bible indeed plainly explains. It would carry too far to sum up all the details of God's plan with man here, but we find the essence of it in Genesis 1, where God says to man: "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1 : 28) God's instruction to the individual man was to rule over His creation. It goes without saying that man, since he changed from a 'living soul' into a 'dying soul', has become totally unsuitable for the execution of that Divine assignment. Man succeeded in multiplying himself but he was not successful in having dominion over the earth. Instead of dominion, 'fear' and 'terror' arose. Compare Genesis 1 :

28-30 with Genesis 9 : 1-3. Meanwhile, man is either doomed to die, or dead and buried with Christ. Obviously, someone who has now already been declared dead by God, is in fact in a worse state than someone who will lose his sinful nature only at the time of his physical death. It is in this context that Paul says:

“If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.” (1 Corinthians 15 : 19)

“And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.” (1 Corinthians 15 : 14)

“And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.” (1 Corinthians 15 : 17, 18)

Not only in this life have we our hope in Christ! This life has already 'passed away in Christ', but that is certainly not the end of the story. We, believers, have not 'passed away before our time'. Christ does not take life away from people; He came to give life. He did not only suffer for us; He did not only die for us; He was also raised for us. If His suffering was our suffering; and if His death was our death; then His resurrection would be also our resurrection. We, who believe, have died, have been buried and raised. That is why Paul says: "And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" (1 Corinthians 15 : 17) But Christ has been raised and we have been raised with Him. We find this truth extensively in Ephesians 2 and Romans 6.

“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we

shall also live with Him [...]. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6 : 3-11)

Because of our position 'in Christ' we lost our old, carnal nature, just as Christ did; but through that same status 'in Christ' we received new life in Him, life from the dead. Both these matters are taught in exactly the same way by the literal translation of Romans 6 : 23: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 6 : 9 explains that this resurrection life of Christ is eternal life: "Knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him." This life is the life that Christ revealed after His resurrection. This life is a life that only begins after death. When we ask the question: "Is there life after death?" the only correct answer is: "Yes, there is life after death, but only in the risen and glorified Christ." And we can receive this life now already, if we believe that He died in our place. Then His death is our death, and then His life is our life. And because that life begins where death ends, it is everlasting life.

So eternal life is absolutely not a prolongation, through countless centuries, of the life that Adam possessed before the Fall. It is life on a totally different level and of a different nature than the life that God breathed into Adam's nostrils. This difference is so powerful that the Greek original text of the New Testament even uses different words for both kinds of life. Natural human life is 'psyche', which is translated as 'life', but also very often as 'soul'. The adjective 'psychicos' is derived from this, which is translated as 'natural' and is used for the kind of life that Adam passed on to his posterity. As it is written: "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God [...]." (1 Corinthians 2 : 14) Actually 'psychicos' should have been translated as 'soul' because 'soul' is the definition of the kind of life man received by nature. Of Adam it is said, when God breathed life in him: "[...] and man became a living soul." (Genesis 2 : 7) So the old nature is a soul, because Adam was a soul, and that is why his descendants are also souls. 'Psyche' is therefore the natural life of humanity. It is also the life that the Lord Jesus gave up on behalf of that same humanity. The life that Christ gives to a believer (eternal life) is denoted by the Greek word 'zoe'. "And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this (this kind of) life (zoe) is in his Son." (1 John 5 : 11) So this eternal life, the gift of God (Romans 6 : 23),

is in Christ; it is the life that Christ now has and gives, and it is denoted by a special term: 'zoe'.

The distinction between these two kinds of life stands out strongly in the Gospel of John. For instance, in John 10 : 10 the Lord says: "I have come that they (the sheep of the good Shepherd) may have life (zoe)." He did not come to bring the sheep to life, for they were living sheep already before He came; but He came to give them a new kind of life: not 'psyche' but 'zoe'. But in the next verse the Saviour says: "I am the good Shepherd; the good Shepherd gives His life (psyche) for the sheep." The life that Christ gave up was 'psyche', the life that He gives is 'zoe'.

"Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life [*psyche*] a ransom for many." (Matthew 20 : 28)

"My soul [*psyche*] is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death." (Matthew 26 : 38)

"Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down my life [*psyche*], that I may take it again." (John 10 : 17)

On the other hand He says:

"I am the Resurrection, and the Life [*zoe*] [...]." (John 11 : 25)

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life [*zoe*]." (John 14 : 6)

In John 12 we find these words together in one verse. Much of the meaning of this Scripture is lost, when we do not distinguish 'psyche' from 'zoe'. In verse 24 the Lord speaks about His future suffering and dying, when He says: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain." It is not difficult to recognize the Lord Jesus in this grain of wheat, who by His dying and resurrection produces much fruit. After that follow the words: "He who loves his life [*psyche*] will lose it; and he who hates his life [*psyche*] in this world will keep it for eternal life [*zoe*]." (John 12 : 25) Here we read a promise for those who are prepared to be crucified for the world with Christ and

in this manner wish to hate their life (psyche) in the world: They receive eternal life (zoe). (See also Ephesians 2 : 1 and 6)

Moreover, the mentioning of the grain of wheat must have been very significant for the Jewish listeners. In Biblical systematics wheat comes first in the order of the fruits. The Hebrew word for 'wheat' opens a perspective in symbolism, as demonstrated in the Bible. For the word for 'wheat' is 'chittah', a word that is derived from the root 'chet', which means 'sin', 'to sin' and 'sinner'. So, wheat represents man, who is burdened by sin and is therefore, in the first instance, a type of Christ, who was made sin for us, and subsequently of the other descendants of Adam. From that same root, also the word 'chatav' is derived, which is translated as 'hew' or 'to cut down'. This is almost a matter of course, since 'to cut down' is a depiction of 'to bring to death': The result of sin is death, is it not? Solely on account of the relation between these words, it can be assumed that wheat is a type of man burdened with sin, who is doomed. But the Lord Jesus adds something to this symbolism. According to what He says, death does not have the final word, for after the grain of wheat has died, it brings forth fruit. Also after the wheat (chittah) has been cut down (chatav), and in this way cut off from life, it can still bring forth life by being sown in the earth.

In the same symbolic manner, this is also expressed in the Old Testament, for another word from the same 'sinful' root is 'choter', which in Isaiah 11 : 1 is translated as 'rod': "There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots [...]" It is not hard to see that this Rod is no Other than the Lord Jesus Christ. He was made to be sin (chet) for us; He was the true Grain of Wheat (chittah). He was cut down (chatav) or cut off; but He rose from the dead as the Rod (choter) from the stem of Jesse. Of course, that stem was cut down when He died, but by His resurrection He appeared as the 'Rod' in Isaiah 11. That chapter is indeed not about the coming of the Messiah to suffer and die, but about His return in glory to establish His kingdom as the risen Christ. This and much more is depicted by a simple grain of wheat.

12. Resurrection and regeneration

In John 12 the Lord Himself applies this image of the grain of wheat that must die in order to bear fruit to every believer. Paul does the same, but uses different words: "[...] as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off (just as He did), concerning your former conduct, the old man [...] and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness." (Ephesians 4 : 21, 22 and 24) Here 'psyche' and 'zoe' are again placed on opposite sides as it were: the old man opposite the new man; Adam opposite Christ, the last Adam. The images of the grain of wheat and of the first and last Adam are found combined in 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul speaks of the resurrection. He compares the body of his old nature (psyche) with a grain of wheat that is sown. "And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain - perhaps wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body." (1 Corinthians 15 : 37, 38) After that many verses follow to illustrate the distinction between that which is sown and that which comes up as fruit; between that which dies and that, which is raised. For a proper understanding of this we present a literal translation of verse 44:

"It is sown a natural [*psyche*] body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural [*psyche*] body, and there is a spiritual body." (1 Corinthians 15 : 44)

So there are two kinds of bodies, as there are two kinds of life. The life of the first kind is that of Adam and is called 'soul' (psyche); the second kind is the life of the risen Christ and is called 'spirit'. In the Bible 'eternal life', the life of resurrection, is defined by the word 'zoe', but also by the word 'spirit'. The new life that is given by Christ is spirit. And that is exactly what the next verses state: "And so it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being.' The last Adam became a life-giving spirit [*zoe*]." (1 Corinthians 15 : 45) What is more, to make sure that there is absolutely no misunderstanding about this, Paul states who this first and who this last Adam is: "The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven." (1 Corinthians 15 : 47) So in this passage two kinds of life are compared: one is 'natural' (psychicos) and the other is spiritual. "However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual." (1 Corinthians 15 : 46) The natural life is the life of Adam and of all who are descended from him. It

is the life, which is burdened by sin; it is flesh. The other life is spirit and is the life of Christ and of all who are 'in Christ', because they have been raised with Him. The first is flesh; the second is spirit.

After Paul has compared these two opposites, he makes a remark that only refers to the first kind, the flesh: "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption." (1 Corinthians 15 : 50) This brings us right back to the conversation between the Lord Jesus and Nicodemus, the conversation about regeneration. There the Lord explains that someone, who has only been born once, namely from Adam, cannot see the kingdom of God. "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3 : 3) And in addition to this, John follows with: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3 : 5) The first birth is a birth of flesh, as we have already explained, and certainly does not make someone suitable for the kingdom of God. But according to the Lord Himself regeneration is birth of the Spirit: and that is what is necessary for that kingdom. He places both these kinds of life on opposite sides as well, when He says: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3 : 6)

When we summarize these remarks of the Lord Jesus and Paul about these kinds of life, we come to the following conclusion:

There are two kinds of life; one is first in order, the other is second. (1 Corinthians 15 : 46)

The first is called 'psyche' or 'flesh', the second is called 'zoe' or 'spirit'.

The first is mortal, the second is everlasting. (1 Corinthians 15 : 42, 43)

The first is earthly, the second is heavenly. (1 Corinthians 15 : 47-49)

The first is 'in Adam', the second is 'in Christ'. The first leads to death, the second to the kingdom of God. The first is received by birth, the second, according to Paul, by the resurrection to life, and according to the Lord Himself by regeneration. This last fact is extremely important in order to understand what regeneration really is.

If both resurrection and regeneration bring forth eternal life, then that tells us that resurrection and regeneration are identical: resurrection equals regeneration. This is also readily endorsed by the apostle Peter, when he says: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you." (1 Peter 1 : 3, 4) This inheritance is without any doubt the kingdom of God, of which Paul said that it could not be inherited by flesh and blood; but according to Peter, we, who have been regenerated by God, receive that inheritance. And how would regeneration take place according to Peter? "By the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." So, he too confirms that resurrection and regeneration are synonyms.

Moreover, let us not lose track of the fact that although regeneration is the same as resurrection, the opposite is not automatically true. Resurrection is not regeneration. This is because the Bible also knows two kinds of resurrection: There is a resurrection of the normal human nature - a resurrection of the flesh - and there is a resurrection 'in newness of life'. We find resurrection of the first kind in the stories of the son of the Shunammite woman, the young man from Nain, the daughter of Jairus, Lazarus and the 'many bodies of the saints' that are mentioned in Matthew 27 : 52, 53. All these people were raised in their old carnal nature and therefore would die again. They did not receive eternal life (zoe) when they were resurrected, but ordinary natural life (psyche). This is confirmed by 1 Corinthians 15 : 20, where it is said that Christ has "become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." He was not the First who was raised in the old nature, but He was the First who was raised from the dead 'in newness of life'. He was the First who was raised from the dead with eternal life. Only this last kind of resurrection is identical to regeneration.

13. Earthly and heavenly things

The fact that regeneration is the same as resurrection to life, casts new light on the Lord's otherwise puzzling question for Nicodemus: "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?" (John 3 : 10) Nicodemus was "a man of the Pharisees" (John 3 : 1), thus a scribe. But 'the Scripture' of this theologian mainly consisted of the Old Testament. In defence of Nicodemus it is therefore commonly

argued that he could not have any knowledge of regeneration, because the concept as such cannot be found in the Old Testament. After all, was it not our Lord Jesus who was the First to use this word 'regeneration' in Matthew 19 : 28? If that were true, the Lord's reproach to Nicodemus would be very unreasonable. But it is not true. Firstly, 'regeneration' can be found in the Old Testament as 'resurrection to life'; secondly, the Hebrew (hence Old Testament) word for 'regeneration' is completely identical to the very frequently used name 'Gilgal'. Thus, keen study of the Old Testament would certainly lead to knowledge of regeneration. Moreover, the translation of 'Gilgal' to 'reincarnation' led to a lot of misunderstandings in Judaism. 'Reincarnation' literally means 'become flesh again', while regeneration is not the 'genesis of flesh', but rather the 'genesis of spirit'. The doctrine of reincarnation is in fact nothing but a corruption of the doctrine of regeneration, whereby the age of the doctrine of reincarnation is an indication of how old the knowledge of regeneration must be. A study on regeneration, as it is found in the Old Testament, will show that the Bible acknowledges other forms of regeneration besides the individual regeneration. It is this aspect of regeneration to which the Lord refers, when He tells Nicodemus: "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" (John 3 : 12) So there are earthly things as well as heavenly things, which are called 'regeneration'. Regeneration on a heavenly level is explained in the following verses:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”
(John 3 : 16)

It should now be obvious that 'regeneration' as we have expounded here must be reckoned to the heavenly things:

“The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.” (1 Corinthians 15 : 47-49)

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.” (1 Peter 1 : 3, 4)

The regeneration that must be reckoned among the earthly things will be discussed later.

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Bible Study Series 'Regeneration'

'Regeneration' is the great theme of the Bible. The Biblical message is not only that Jesus, as the Lamb of God, died for the sins of the world and thus satisfied the righteousness of God.



If one died for all, they all died. (2 Corinthians 5 : 14) And when all, whether believing or not believing, are dead, then all have perished. (1 Corinthians 15 : 18) But the story does not end at the cross! On the contrary.

According to the Bible, God's work encompasses the forming of a new creation from the old, current one. He is forming a new man from the old man, a new Israel from the old Israel, a new creation from the old one. In reference to mankind this is called, among other things, 'regeneration' or 'resurrection'. However, many other expressions are used for that same work of the Creator, who said, "Behold, I make all things new."

Unfortunately, it is often thought that God, just like man, is interested in an improvement of the old. Many Biblical truths have fallen into oblivion, among which also the truth that He, the Creator, is busy bringing about a new definite humanity and world, in which regenerated believers, are already partaking. May these pages serve to remind you of this forgotten truth.