

Testamentum Imperium
An International Theological Journal

www.PreciousHeart.net/ti

Volume 1 – 2005-2007

Security of the Believer and the New Birth Metaphor

Dr. A. Burge Troxel, Senior Pastor
Heaston Community Church, El Reno, Oklahoma

Introduction

- A. The New Birth Metaphor
- B. The New Birth and the Imperishable Inheritance
- C. The New Birth and the Imperishable Seed
- D. The New Birth and the New Self
- E. The New Birth and Children of God

Conclusion

Introduction

This paper will present evidence for the doctrine of the Eternal Security of the believer in Christ by examining the New Birth metaphor for salvation. It will be shown that by using the metaphor of birth for salvation, the Bible intends to communicate the concept that our Salvation is secure and cannot be reversed or undone any more than natural birth could be.

For the purposes of this paper the following terminology will be utilized: The New Birth and Spiritual Birth will be used interchangeably to denote being Born Again, being born from above, eternal salvation, becoming a son or child of God, etc. In other words Spiritual Birth and New Birth will be used as the equivalent of eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

The following passages of Scripture will be discussed:

John 3:3-8 teaches that birth is an authorized analogy of salvation due its use by Jesus Christ, Himself and therefore is as irreversible as natural birth and thus the believer is eternally secure.

1 Peter 1:3-5 teaches that Spiritual Birth gives the believer an inheritance which cannot perish and therefore the believer is eternally secure.

1 Peter 1:23 teaches that Spiritual Birth has been produced from an imperishable seed and is itself therefore imperishable and thus the believer is eternally secure.

1 John 5:18 teaches that Spiritual Birth involves a supernatural internal change in one's being or self that cannot be reversed and therefore renders the believer eternally secure.

Hebrews 12:8 teaches that Spiritual Birth results in a permanent family relationship with God that sinful actions cannot unravel. The evidence that a rebellious "professing Christian" is not a Christian is their lack of divine chastisement not the presence of rebellion. Therefore, the believer is eternally secure.

A. The New Birth Metaphor

John 3:3-8 clearly indicates that physical birth is a metaphor for Spiritual Birth and implies that Spiritual Birth like physical birth cannot be undone or repeated.

John 3:3-8: ³In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." ⁴"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" ⁵Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' ⁸The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

It is instructive that Nicodemus' thoughts about the New Birth instinctively go in the direction of natural or physical birth. He is rightly certain that natural birth cannot be repeated. It is patently obvious that once born no one can become eligible to be born again physically.

Jesus uses Nicodemus' confusion to authorize the birth metaphor. In John 3:6 He says, "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." He is clearly explaining to Nicodemus that natural childbirth is not in view but actually a spiritual birth that is from above. In continuing the analogy, Jesus had established a link or analogy between natural birth and spiritual birth.

Attempts to link the term “born of water” with water baptism fail because of the context. Christian baptism was not yet being practiced and John’s baptism was never a condition for or even related to Spiritual Birth. The most natural reading of the text requires that Jesus take seriously Nicodemus’ question and continue to respond to him in context. By using reasonable terms for natural birth (water and flesh), Jesus helps Nicodemus to understand the nature of the second birth that Jesus is presenting to him. Weirsbe reminds us that the term born of water is an unlikely reference to water baptism:

Being a patient teacher, our Lord picked up on Nicodemus’ words and further explained the new birth. To be “born of water” is to be born physically (“enter a second time into his mother’s womb”) but to be born again means to be born of the Spirit. Just as there are two parents for physical birth, so there are two “parents” for spiritual birth: the Spirit of God (John 3:5) and the Word of God (James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23–25). The Spirit of God takes the Word of God and, when the sinner believes, imparts the life of God.

Jesus was not teaching that the new birth comes through water baptism. In the New Testament, baptism is connected with *death*, not birth; and no amount of physical water can effect a spiritual change in a person. The emphasis in John 3:14–21 is on *believing*, because salvation comes through faith (Eph. 2:8–9). The evidence of salvation is the witness of the Spirit within (Rom. 8:9), and the Spirit enters your life when you believe (Acts 10:43–48; Eph. 1:13–14).¹

Therefore, by using the word birth to describe Eternal Salvation, Jesus has introduced the metaphor which allows us to conclude that just as natural birth cannot be undone or repeated, so it is with spiritual birth.

To sum up: The New Birth metaphor authorized by Jesus in John 3:6 makes it clear that just as it is impossible to become unborn physically, it is impossible to become unborn spiritually.

¹Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (Jn 3:1). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

B. The New Birth and the Imperishable Inheritance

Peter states that the new birth gives us an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This is a powerful statement that uses terminology that requires us to conclude that the New Birth brings to the life of the believer an inheritance that can “never perish.” If the consequences of the New Birth can “never perish,” then the New Birth cannot be undone and the believer is eternally secure. 1 Peter 1:3-5 powerfully states that the Spiritual Birth provides an eternally secure hope.

1 Peter 1:3-5: ³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, ⁵who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

This passage clearly states that the Spiritual Birth is a hope that is based upon Jesus Christ’s resurrection and can never perish or even spoil or fade. It is being kept (safe) in heaven and it is shielded by God’s power.

Constable explains the permanent nature of this transaction:

“Born again” (cf. v. 23) describes the Christian who experienced spiritual regeneration (John 3:3). The phrase stresses the great change that takes place at conversion and our resultant participation in the life of God. God has been exceedingly merciful in giving us this blessing (cf. Rom. 11:30–32; 15:9; Eph. 2:1–7; Titus 3:5).

1:4 As the Israelites anticipated their inheritance, the Promised Land, so Christians should anticipate ours, the other side of the grave. However ours is not subject to destruction from any source, defilement from without, or decay from within. No one can ravage or pollute it, and it will not wear out or waste away. What is it exactly? Our inheritance is Jesus Christ Himself and the blessings that He has promised us (cf. 1 John 3:2; Col. 3:4; Eph. 1:14; Rom. 8:11, 18–23). All Christians will not obtain the same amount of inheritance (cf. 2 Tim. 2:12; Matt. 25:14–30; et al.), but every Christian will obtain some inheritance. Heaven will be the portion of all, but rewards will vary (1 Cor. 3:14–15; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 John 8).²

²Tom Constable. (2003; 2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (1 Pe 1:3-4). Galaxie Software.

To sum up: Spiritual Birth gives the believer an inheritance which cannot perish and therefore the believer is eternally secure.

C. The New Birth and the Imperishable Seed

Peter again uses terminology which cannot have any other interpretation but that the results of being born again are imperishable. In this verse Peter states that being born again is the result of the use of an imperishable seed. Note again the reference to physical birth.

1 Peter 1:23: ²³For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

The word imperishable includes the concept of existing eternally. Thus, the New Birth is a condition that lasts forever. Arndt, Danker, and Bauer give the following meaning to the English word

ἄφθαρτος, ον (s. φθείρω) pert. to imperviousness to corruption and death, *imperishable, incorruptible, immortal*³

Constable notes that this passage teaches the essence of eternal security:

1:24–25 This quotation from Isaiah 40:6–8 contrasts the transitory character of nature and the eternity of God’s Word (cf. James 1:10–11). Every natural thing eventually dies and disappears, the opposite of God’s living and abiding Word (cf. Matt. 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33). The seed lives and abides, and so do those to whom it gives new life.⁴

Weirsbe points out the eternal nature of the Spiritual Birth:

Peter likes this phrase “born again”; he uses it in 1:3 and 1:23. We are born again through God’s mercy unto a living hope, and we are born again by the Word of God unto love for the people of God. He compares the Word to seed, as Jesus does in the Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:1–9, 18–23). Like a seed, the Word is small and seemingly insignificant, but it has life and power within. The Word must be planted to do any good; but when it is planted in the heart, it produces fruit. God’s Word is eternal, and the fruit it produces is eternal; but the things of the flesh do not last. Peter refers in vv. 24–25 to Isa. 40:6–8. Whatever we do in

³Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*. (3rd ed.) (Page 155). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁴Tom Constable. (2003; 2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (1 Pe 1:24). Galaxie Software.

obedience to the Word of God will last forever! But whatever we do in the energy of the flesh will look beautiful for a time, but will then die.⁵

To sum up: 1 Peter 1:23 definitely teaches that the New Birth is the result of an imperishable “seed” and therefore is itself imperishable.

D. The New Birth and the New Self

The Bible explains that the New Birth changes the individual so significantly that the part of us that is truly “born of God” does not sin. Therefore, our eternal destiny is secure. The following verses explain that being born of God creates a sinless inner most being that does not sin.

1 John 3:9: 9Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. (NKJV)

1 John 3:9: 9No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.

1 John 5:18: 18We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him. (NKJV)

1 John 5:18: 18We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him.

These verses explain that someone who has been “born again” has been changed in a remarkable way that cannot be unraveled. Notice that the NIV translates the present tense as “continue to sin,” while the NKJV simply translates it as “sin.” Hodges explains the issue with the difference in translation as follows:

5:18. As in 3:6, 9 (see comments below) the words continue to are not justified by the original. John was affirming that anyone born of God is a

⁵Wiersbe, W. W. (1997, c1992). *Wiersbe's expository outlines on the New Testament*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

person whose true, inward nature is inherently sinless. (Cf. “born of God” in 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4.)⁶

Hodges in the Bible Knowledge Commentary explains that this passage teaches that the Spiritual Birth creates a situation where sinful impulses come from the world, flesh or Devil but not from the inner being of the believer:

3:5-6. The seriousness of sin is further underscored by the consideration that Christ appeared so that He might take away our sins. And in Him is no sin. The Incarnation brought into the world the One who is totally sinless and who had as an objective the removal of sin from the lives of His own (cf. John 1:29; Heb. 9:28a). It follows logically from this that a person who is (“abides”) *in* a sinless Person must himself be sinless, for he has a sinless, regenerate nature.

This is the inescapable logic of the text. But a different point is suggested by the NIV’s rendering: **No one who lives (menōn, “abides”) in Him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen Him or known Him.** A widely held explanation of this verse is that a believer “does not sin habitually,” that is, sin is not his way of life. However, the Greek text has no words to represent phrases such as “keeps on” or “continues to” or “habitually.” These phrases are based on an understanding of the Greek present tense which is now widely in dispute among New Testament scholars (see, e.g., S. Kubo, “1 John 3, 9: Absolute or Habitual?” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 7. 1969:47-56; C.H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles*, pp. 78-81; I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, p. 180). It cannot be shown anywhere in the New Testament that the present tense can bear this kind of meaning *without the assistance of other words*. Such a view is invalid for this verse and also for 1 John 3:9. Nor is John saying that sinless perfection must be achieved, and that those who fail to do so lose their salvation. Such a notion is foreign to John’s argument and to all of Scripture.⁷

This concept is parallel to the one in Romans 6 and 7 where the believer has been in a profound way made to be dead to sin:

⁶Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁷Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Romans 6:1-2: ¹What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ²By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

Romans 6:6: ⁶For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—

This verse should, in my opinion, be translated as: “For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered less powerful, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.” This is similar to the NIV alternate reading.

Romans 7:22: ²²For in my inner being I delight in God’s law;

This idea is simply that the New Birth has made such a fundamental change in the “innermost being” of the individual that it would be impossible to reverse this change. So the result is again that the New Birth cannot be undone so the believer is eternally secure. The meaning of the “new creation” is parallel to all of this and teaches the exact same thing.

2 Corinthians 5:17: ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

The New Birth involves a supernatural internal change in one’s being or self that cannot be reversed. Some have suggested that the being “born of God” is a reference to Christ. Hodges clarifies the situation:

The additional statement about **the one who was born of God** is not, as often suggested, a reference to Christ. John nowhere else referred to Christ in this way; and he was still writing about regenerate people. On this view, the word “himself” should be read in place of **him**. John thus affirmed that “the one who has been born of God *keeps himself*” (there is no word for **safe** in the original). This restates the truth of 3:9 in a slightly different form. A believer’s new man (or “new self”; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10) is fundamentally impervious to sin and hence **the evil one** (cf. 1 John 2:13-14; 3:12), Satan, **does not touch him**.⁸

⁸Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

To sum up: Spiritual Birth involves a supernatural internal change in one's being or self that cannot be reversed and therefore renders the believer eternally secure.

E. The New Birth and Children of God

Another line of reasoning that leads to the conclusion that the New Birth metaphor is designed to affirm eternal security is the picture given of what happens when a member of God's family sins grievously. The conventional wisdom of those who reject eternal security is that any persistent sinning on the part of the Christian should lead to loss of salvation. Hebrews 12 presents a discussion of God's discipline that completely refutes such an idea.

Hebrews 12:8: ⁸If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

The evidence that someone is not a Christian is the absence of discipline not the presence of sin, unfaithfulness or some other failure in one's life. Hebrews 12:8 teaches us that the Spiritual Birth results in a permanent relationship with God that sinful actions cannot unravel. The argument that persistent sin might cause a believer to lose his salvation is contradicted by the biblical teaching that it is the absence of discipline that suggests that the person is not saved. God's response to the Christian who sins is not loss of salvation but discipline. Just like in the human family. A rebellious child is not disowned but disciplined. The story of the prodigal son confirms this understanding of our relationship into God's family via the New Birth.

Luke 15:24: ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

Spiritual Birth which makes us Children of God who are eternally secure is further indicated in the following verses:

Luke 11:11: ¹¹“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?

Luke 15:31: ³¹“My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.

Luke 18:17: ¹⁷I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

Romans 8:17: ¹⁷Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Romans 8:21: ²¹that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Galatians 4:7: ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

1 John 3:1-2: ¹How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

To sum up: Spiritual Birth results in a permanent family relationship with God that sinful actions cannot unravel. The evidence that a rebellious “professing Christian” is not a Christian is lack of discipline not the presence of rebellion. Therefore, the believer is eternally secure.

Summary

From the passages examined in this paper it has been determined that the New Birth is a metaphor which is designed to communicate the truth that the believer in Christ is eternally secure. Jesus Christ authorized this analogy by comparing spiritual birth with physical birth. Peter describes the New Birth with terms such as imperishable that can only mean that the believer is eternally secure. John describes the believer in terms that indicate that the new “inner being” of the believer is a new creation that cannot itself sin. Therefore, the believer is secure and the New Birth is irreversible. The author of Hebrews describes the believer who enters the family of God via the New Birth as someone who is disciplined when he sins not disowned.

Therefore the New Birth metaphor is intended to communicate to the believer that he or she is eternally secure.

Finally it is important to remember that the New Birth is brought about by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. The Apostle John puts it this way:

John 1:12-13: ¹²Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³children born

not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.