

A butterfly

Caterpillars become butterflies. Recently I was reminded of this classic illustration while listening to a sermon by James Bryan Smith, a leader in the Christian renewal ministry, RENOVARE. Caterpillars give their attention to the things on earth. Butterflies give their attention to the things of the heavens. Caterpillars move by their own power. Butterflies are held aloft by the wind of the heavens. Caterpillars see only what is in front of them as they busily munch along. Butterflies see the broader view.

The metamorphosis is the real point though. No matter if you scotch-taped wings to a caterpillar, it would still be a caterpillar. And no matter if you taped flat the wings of a butterfly, and told it to crawl like a caterpillar, it would still nonetheless be a butterfly.

We don't wait until death to be raised from the dead.

Those of us who are born again by God's Spirit are already raised from the dead. The resurrection life of Jesus has entered into our souls and bodies. We have become butterflies. Our wings are invisible. But they enable us to soar aloft moved by the impulse and breathing of God's Holy Spirit. Even when we revert and try to act again like caterpillars, it is awkward at best and very unsatisfactory. We are butterflies. We are not caterpillars any more. The metamorphosis has happened. We live, trusting Jesus, learning from him how to live our new life in the kingdom of God. Granted, our instincts can still be very caterpillar-like until "who we are in Christ" really takes hold of our mind and new habits are formed. But this is why the Bible teaches us to "grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Pe 3:18)

The caterpillar life of humans is described in the Bible as living "according to the flesh." The "flesh" is human nature, independent of grace. It is unaided human effort. It has been trained in habits of sin. It is characterized by a lust for pleasure, a



*Scott
Hilborn*

*Guest
Columnist*

lust for personal glory, and a lust for personal power. Those "in the flesh" cannot please God (Ro 8:8). They are spiritually dead in trespasses and sins. They can be quite respectable from a human point of view—or quite twisted. They are by nature hostile to God.

I don't look down my nose at those who are still caterpillars. I used to be one. The fact is I would still be one, except that God's kindness broke into my sin-loving heart and I became born again into his kingdom. The best thing I can do for those who are still caterpillars is to be more and more fully who I am really am in Christ—namely, a butterfly!

What does being a butterfly look like in spiritual terms? First, middle, and end, butterflies are learning to trust Jesus with everything. Not only trusting Jesus with our getting to heaven when we die, but also trusting him with our allergies, and trusting him with our bills. We trust him for success at work. We trust him to generate love in our families. As we trust Jesus more and more, our butterfly wings open more and more. We find we are upheld in life by God's Holy Spirit. What does this look like? Peace. Rest. A non-compliance with evil. A turning-loose of anger, contempt, lust, fear, and worry. Particularly fear and worry. We trust Jesus.

Suppose you have been acting like a caterpillar again. Seized with anxious fear and striving to secure yourself. What shall you do? Further striving and straining, caterpillar-like, is not the answer. The answer is to rest in God and whom he has made you to be in Christ—

a butterfly. God has made you into a new person. The metamorphosis is complete. You are not part butterfly and part caterpillar. You are all butterfly. Maybe you need to learn how to fly again? OK. Jesus will teach you how again. Just trust him.

The "law of sin waging war in our bodies," as described by the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 7, is NOT a picture of who we really are once we have been born again. Paul writes, "For what I do is not the good I want to do, no the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing!" True, this can easily be a description of personal experience, but it is the experience of the believer still trying to live up to the Law's demands. The Law of God, though wonderful in itself, if held up as the rule of life to follow, only incites the caterpillar tendencies. We are no longer under the condemnation of the Law, because we live upheld by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. (Ro 8:1) We have been discharged from the Law, because we are a caterpillar no more, but now serve in the newness of the Spirit-led, butterfly life. (Ro 7:6)

Having been born "from above," we have already entered into the full-life of God. We are training for our eventual reigning with Jesus. We are butterflies, no longer caterpillars. If at times we forget and act like caterpillars, we don't attempt to become a butterfly again, we instead call to mind who we already are in Christ. We have already been raised with Christ (Col 3:1). We now share in the life to come. Therefore, we rest our hearts on Jesus and allow ourselves to be carried aloft by the breathing of his Holy Spirit. God is sufficient. We trust in him.

*Scott Hilborn is the pastor of the
Banks Presbyterian Church in Marvin.*