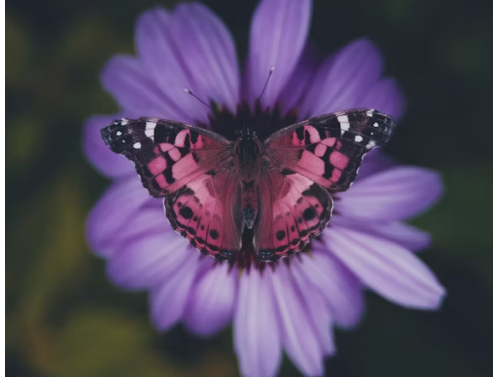


Spiritual Metamorphosis: Becoming a New Creation in Christ

By Marco Scouvert



I enjoy reading *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* with my young children. This board book classic is useful for teaching kids colors, numbers, names of different foods, the days of the week, and the gastric consequences of eating too much food in one day! But perhaps the best part of this story is its depiction of the process known as “metamorphosis.” Scientists understand this to be the drastic alteration that takes place during the life cycle of an animal as it changes from its young to adult forms over the course of multiple stages of development.

Young children may not be able to pronounce metamorphosis, but they see the effects of it all around them. Insects are the most famous creatures that experience metamorphosis in the course of their lives, including ants, beetles, bees, fleas, and flies. An estimated eighty percent of known insects (which accounts for about sixty percent of known animals) undergo this fascinating conversion.

Some animal transformations are more extreme than others, resulting in changes of diet and behavior. Certain insects emerge with brand-new body parts, such as wings and reproductive organs. This is what scientists call “complete metamorphosis.” Take, for example, butterflies. As scientific journalist Aaron Tremper put it, “A crawling, leaf-munching caterpillar can transition into a flying, nectar-sipping butterfly within a few weeks” (“Explainer: What is Metamorphosis,” www.snexplores.org). Into the chrysalis creeps the pale, hairy, stout grub. And out of it flutters the vibrant, slender, symmetrically majestic Monarch!

“Yes, But it is No Longer I!”

Aurelius Augustinus, more commonly known as “Augustine,” was born in Northern Africa in A.D. 354. In his late teens he was away from home while attending rhetoric school in the city of Carthage. Surrounded by classmates who boasted about their sexual immorality, Augustine acknowledged in his *Confessions* that he both sought and made up stories of sexual experiences to gain their acceptance.

His love affair with rhetoric eventually took him first to Rome, and then to Milan at the age of thirty-one. There he visited and put himself under the influence of the Bishop, a man named Ambrose. By his own admission, he was not interested in Christianity or the truth of the church. Rather, he was attracted to Ambrose as a friendly man and a master rhetorician he could learn from. All the while he continued to live a life of wanton sin, hedonistically indulging himself in carnal pleasure outside of marriage, enslaved to his lustful passions.

But that all dramatically changed when Augustine was dramatically changed the following year. One day, after a serious conversation with a believer, he found himself embroiled in a spiritual war. He was confronted by his unclean affections and conflicted about leaving them to follow Jesus. Tormented inwardly, he wept and cried out to God in prayer when he heard what he interpreted to be a voice from heaven telling him to pick up the writings of the Apostle Paul which were nearby and to read them. He did and was instantly set free from his sin and converted to Christ!

It has been alleged that sometime after this, Augustine was walking through the streets and one of his old mistresses saw him and greeted him by name. He did not reply but kept moving, so she continued after him and calling out to him. He did not reply so eventually she said, “Augustine, it is I” and named herself. To this Augustine turned and replied, “Yes, but it is no longer I.” The old Augustine was dead. He had experienced a spiritual metamorphosis that radically transformed him into a new creation in Jesus and forever changed his relationship with old acquaintances and desires.

Questionable Grammar, Powerful Truth!

Once when I recounted that story a man said to me, “That sounds like bad grammar. He should have said, ‘It is no longer me.’” The grammar of Augustine’s statement may be questionable, but the truth is thoroughly biblical. In fact it is a direct, albeit partial, quote of the Apostle Paul: “I have been crucified with Christ. *It is no longer* I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

This is the transformation that every believer has experienced through faith in Jesus. Romans 6:1-7 says we have been joined to the Lord, and through that union our old man has been crucified and buried with him, causing us to die to sin and setting us free from its enslaving power. And just as Jesus was raised from the dead, we also have been raised up as new men to walk in new life with the Spirit of the risen Christ empowering us from within.

If we are going to consistently live out this new life we must believe it to be true about us in Christ and we must respond to sin when it comes calling, the same way that Augustine responded to his old mistress. Charles Spurgeon said, “That to Madam Bubble and to Madam Wanton, to the world, the flesh, and the devil, should be the answer of every true servant of Christ: ‘I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.’”

So when an immoral thought comes into your mind, or an impulse to react in an angry way appears, or you sense that you are being tempted to lie or speak evil against someone, what should you do? Immediately remind yourself: “I am dead to sin. The old me may have found this attractive, but the old me is dead and I am a new creature in Christ Jesus. And by the resurrection glory and power of God at work within me, I will not entertain its calls to me.” Or you can do what my father-in-law, Jim Elliff, does and simply remind yourself in the moment of temptation, “I’m dead to this,” and move on.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)