

OUR WALK
First Things First
Part 3
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In these next few weeks we're in this Bible study on Christian growth for new believers, First Things First. I am giving messages that parallel this book. I want to give several messages to the title and the topic The Things That are New.

When you become a Christian, God makes everything new. In Christ we have a new covenant. We have a new commandment. We have a new name, a new song. We have a new heaven and a new earth. A New Jerusalem. A new family. A new task. Even a new language. And not necessarily speaking in other tongues but a new language of words such as justification, sanctification, glorification, propitiation, expiation, all those wonderful theological words. A new vocabulary to describe what has happened to us. The Father says from his eternal throne of Revelation 21:5 "Behold I am making all things new." That's not something simply related for the future. That is already occurring now. He is making everything new.

Today I want to look with you at two things that are new in our life because of the Lord's presence. When you make Jesus the Savior and Lord of your life the first thing that he makes new is your nature, you're given a new nature.

We know that living things must exist between the limits of their nature. A dog nature is to live on land and therefore the dog doesn't live in the water and whales don't live on land and eagles don't crawl along the ground and moles don't soar into the heavens. What they do, the terms of their existence is fixed by their nature.

Sometimes philosophers call this the ontological connection. Something is something because that's the way it is. That's its ontological being. Why for example in a baseball game are there just four bases. Because that's the way it is! Things are the way they are because that's the way they are. The environment and life span of all things living is determined according to its nature. It's the same way with us – human beings. Few of us are ever going to reach a hundred years of age. And none of us, barring a development of modern medicine, none of us are going to live to be 150.

The second law of thermodynamics tells us that our biological frame is winding down. The hymn writer says it more poetically: Change and decay in all around I see. No one that I know of us getting stronger and healthier and younger as they get older. As they are pulled along into life's later years. We are all by virtue of our nature going back to the dust.

Of all the living things, we men, women are the only ones who can attain to the nature and existence of a life form that is higher than our own. Quality and quantity differ from our own. How? We were born, sons and daughters of men, but through Christ we have the opportunity to become the sons and daughters of God. A different nature. "But to all who received him, who believed on his name, to them he gave power to become children of God, which were born not of blood nor the will of flesh, nor the will of men but of God."

Peter says in 2 Peter 1:4 that we through him participate in the divine nature and John 3:5 says we enter this nature by being born again. Born into a different form of existence.

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When we repent of our sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ he enters our life. “Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone will open the door I will come in to him.” It is “Christ in you,” Paul says in Colossians 1:27, “the hope of glory.” 2 Corinthians 5:17, “If you are in Christ and he is in you, you are a new creation. The old has passed away. The new has come.”

I think maybe God created a butterfly to help us understand the tremendous change that is taking place in our nature because of Christ. The old nature of a butterfly is a caterpillar. It’s hard to believe that a gorgeous and delicate butterfly with its outspread wings emerges from such an ugly looking little creature that creeps along. Who would guess looking at that old ugly brown caterpillar that you don’t even feel comfortable picking up that within that caterpillar is something as beautiful as a butterfly.

A caterpillar crawling along on his twig on any given day can have two ways of looking at himself. He can say, “I am dying. I’m old. I’m ugly.” Or he can say, “Although my outer nature is dying, within me a beautiful thing is taking place.” From one point of view the caterpillar is on his way to death. But from another point of view it’s on its way to life. A far more extravagant and beautiful life.

It’s no different from the Christian. Something radical has happened to our nature. When we invited Jesus Christ into our life, we received a new nature. The hymn writer has said it well “What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought since Jesus came into my heart.” Paul tells us that the old caterpillar nature is gone. If Christ is in you, your body (the caterpillar) is dead because of sin. A caterpillar going along can already think of itself in the past tense. It’s already over. We know the old nature is gone because the new nature is in the old. Therefore we simply make a statement as does Paul. If Christ is in you, the old body is dead because of sin.

But it seems so much alive. It’s crawling along. It walks, it talks, it feels, it moves. It’s alive.

No, it’s not. It is dead because of sin. Yet your spirit the butterfly is alive because of righteousness. And if the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal body that has caused the butterfly to emerge through his spirit who lives in you.

Like the caterpillar-butterfly we are going through metamorphosis. That’s used of the transfiguration of Jesus in the gospels. He changed structure. His human nature gave way to his divine nature in that moment of time.

We are metamorphosing. We are changing form and structure as we walk with Christ. John says it in 1 John 3:3 “Dear friends, now we are the children of God. What we will be has not yet been made known. But we know when he appears we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is.”

I am biologically the son of George Roy and Elizabeth Wood. I bear their likeness. Redheads are in my mother’s side of the family. The genetic stream through milleniums of decent that preceded them has somehow through them wrought its unique combination in me.

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But I'm also *a* son of God. Because of Christ. As my human likeness, unless the Lord comes, gradually lumbers on the way to the tomb, I, on the inside, am being transformed by virtue of the driven nature, the nature of Christ. I am being transformed into Christ's nature with ever increasing glory. That's the testimony of the scripture. 2 Corinthians 3:18 describes any person who is following Christ, their nature is going through change. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:49 that just as we have born the image of the likeness of earthly man so shall bear the likeness of the man from heaven. Just as in some ways I look like my parents on the earthly frame, just as I have born that likeness that genetic pool that somehow found its combination in me, just as I have born that, so shall I bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

Corinthians 4:16 Paul says, "Though our old nature is wasting away inwardly (the butterfly) we are being renewed day by day." Those of you who have been with people who are terminally ill and they are Christians know that as you face that moment with them two things are happening. You are consumed with sorrow and with grief because the outer nature is wasting away. It is dying. But you're filled with hope because you realize unseen to the naked eye there is another dynamic process at work, a process that is birthing a whole new existence. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

Christ has not only changed the quantity of our life, he has changed the quality of our life. One day we'll have totally the new nature evident and even now as the butterfly is incipiently within the caterpillar so we are on the inside now, within the old nature taking on the form and the likeness of Christ. Paul tells us in Ephesians 4 "Put off the likeness of the old man and put on the new likeness." Put on Christ. Think like Christ. Have a heart like Christ. Have compassion like Christ. Feel like Christ, act like Christ. Be your new nature.

We are waiting to break free. But while waiting to break free we are being developed after the likeness of Christ, the new nature. It's a gift from God to us. Everyone of you who have received Christ have a new nature and it's not yet appeared what you shall be. There's hope. There's hope because of Christ. It does not yet appear what we shall be. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him.

A second thing that is new to us when we become a Christian is that our name becomes a new entry in the Bible of life. I use that word "Bible of life" rather deliberately to sort of pique your attention. The Greek word for book is the word *biblos*. It's the word from which we derive Bible. It is used of the Bible of life. The roster that God has in heaven for all of those that have believed in him. That word is used 8 times in the New Testament. When the New Testament repeats something you know it's important.

When you've repented of your sins and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ your name is written in this book. Jesus tells the 70 when they're coming back from a training mission where even evil spirits have been subject to their power (derivative power from him) he says "rejoice not over that. But rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Paul says to fellow believers that he and they have their names written in the book of life. Philippians 4:3. The writer of Hebrews assures early Jewish Christians that they have come to the church of the first born. In biblical times first born was the place of honor, prestige and position and inheritance. The writer of Hebrews says that's what the church is. It's the sons and daughters of God who have prestige, position and inheritance. You've come to the church of the first born and to those whose names are written in heaven.

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John in writing Revelation, 20:11-15, describes the end of time when all humanity appears before the Great White Throne Judgment of God. John says the books were open. Those whose names were not written in the book of life were judged by that which was written in the book of works. It was found deficient. And it was found those whose names were not written in the book of life were cast into eternal fire. What's being said here? It is critical that your name be in the book of life. That's God's gift to you if you believe in his son. Your name is inscribed in the book of life. You're entered on the roster.

What John is saying, what he's giving us an understanding of is that God says to you that he's got a file on your life. The Bible calls it a book. But it might just as easily be a living video tape of every moment you've ever lived. Document your personal history. There's a file running on you in the heavens. No gaps in it. If you choose not to have your name written in the book of life when you come before judgment and your name is not there then we go to the book of works. "The soul that sins it shall die." Sin offends a holy God. But you say, but I want to be judged on the basis of what I've done and if I've lived a relatively decent life I'll take my chances with God. Then God brings out the book of works. And it will be found on the tape of your life enough evidence that will eternally indict and convict you. That's what the Holy Spirit is saying.

It's critical that your name be in the book of life. I'm on many lists. On every list other than the birth list I either chose to be there or not to be there. Same way with you. It's that way with the Lamb's book of life. It is the Lamb's book. It's his book. But we choose whether or not we're going to be there.

It will not surprise me when I get to heaven that that list is not a list written on paper with ink. Knowing the creativity of God I can easily see the Bible of life as a book of featherweight slabs of pure diamond. Names engraved on the featherweight slab. Signaling their sparkling beauty and glory even as in the Old Testament the names of the tribes of Israel were inscribed on precious jewels worn on the high priest's breast and on his shoulder signifying that God's people were dear to him and supported by him. So it is that God may have a special of engraving our names in a luxurious and elegant setting.

Most of the time my preaching is practical oriented. But that is worthless if you don't have a new nature and your name's not written in the Lamb's book of life. That's the bottom line. You either have a new nature or you don't. Your name is either written in the Lamb's book of life or it isn't. If it isn't it ought to be because Jesus makes it possible. If you don't have a new nature, you can have a new nature. But the most important thing you can ever do is have Jesus Christ as the Lord of your life and have your nature changed. We are on this crazy spinning globe that is out in the middle of nowhere. It's spinning around and someday it's going down like we're going down. But we have a God who is pulling us out. He gives us his nature and gives us a visualization of how precious we are to him by letting our name be written in a book in heaven.

Our Father, we thank you today for the gift of life that is in Christ. We use words so easily and lightly – life. But it's real life in you. That never ends. It's like discovering a source of water that never, never quits. Life, glorious life. You've made that possible to us, a new nature, a new name. Lord, for friends who have not had the experience of coming to you, may this be a day of opening their own hearts to you. Lord, for others who do have the new

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nature, sometimes as we make progress through life our eyes because we're like a caterpillar crawling along a twig, we feel at times worthless. We feel at times like we've failed. We wonder where is the life of Christ in me. I don't fly like a butterfly. I'm still at times captive. What is happening? You, through the new birth, have dropped an infallible seed of the new nature into our life. It is within and it's growing. No matter what our outer nature may be suggesting, we have the new nature of Christ. Christ in us the hope of glory. Help us Lord not to listen to the enemy when he comes along and tries to talk us out of the reality that is in you. Keep us from judging other people by the external appearances of the human nature, which is passing. But as fellow believers, help us to esteem one another with the new nature that is developing inside. Thank you, Lord, that you are making all things new. Including us. In Jesus' name. Amen.