

High Peaks Bible Fellowship

Believers Who Act Like Unbelievers 1 Corinthians 3:1-4

Introduction

- Paul had already established the contrast between two categories of men: the Natural vs. the Spiritual
- In this passage he will discuss the condition of the Corinthians which requires him to write as he was writing to them. He presents:
 - The Facts of Their Immaturity (1 Cor 3:1-2)
 - The Evidence for Their Immaturity (1 Cor 3:3-4)

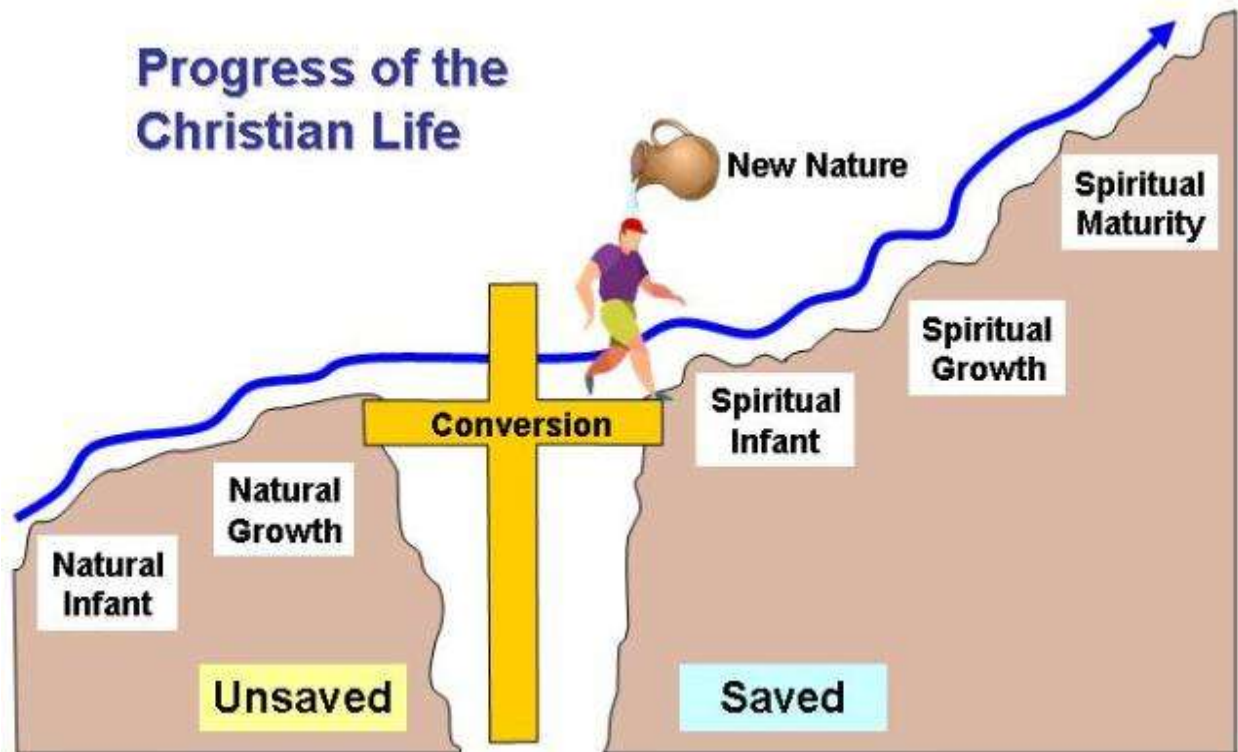
The Facts of Their Immaturity (1 Cor 3:1-2)

- Paul literally says, “And I, brothers, NOT was I given power to speak.” Paul desired to speak to them the truths of God that he received as revelation through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Cor 2:12-13). But he was not able to speak to them as he wanted to because of their condition.
- What was their condition? They were “brothers in Christ.” The people Paul was speaking to belonged to the group of Spiritual people.

Paul’s Three Comparisons:

Notice the comparative word “AS” in each phrase.

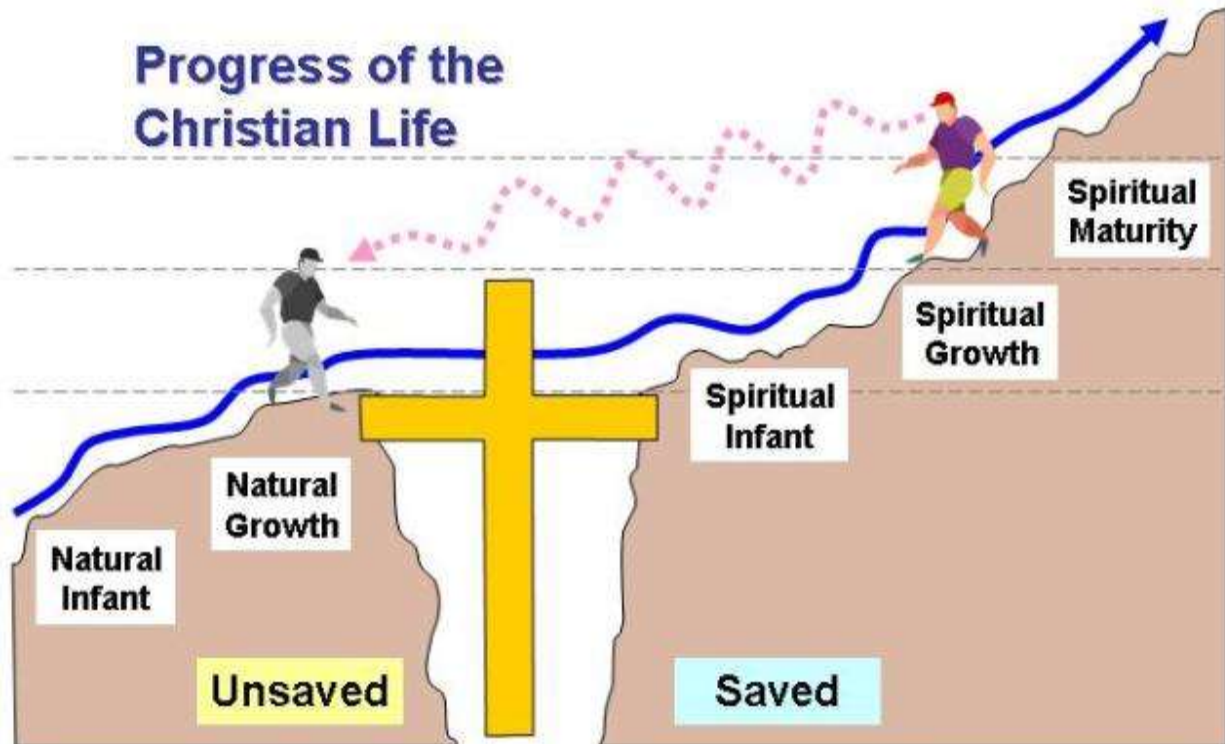
1. “NOT as to spiritual” = These people belonged to the group of SPIRITUAL men, but Paul was forced to speak to them as if they were not part of that group.
2. “But as to fleshly” (*sarkinos*) = made of flesh, consisting of the material of flesh. Paul is saying that he must speak to them like he might speak to ones who were completely made of flesh (the Natural man).
 - “Flesh” (*sarx*) = the outlook oriented toward selfishness which pursues its own ends in self-sufficient independence from God; a worldly identity and has a desire to do what the world does.
3. “As to infants” (*nepios*) = literally, “not speaking” – like very small children. This clearly implies that the Corinthians had experienced the new birth in Christ and belonged to the category of Spiritual men. The normal progression is from the natural man, through conversion, to a babe in Christ, followed by a normal growth toward maturity. There is nothing wrong with starting the Christian life as an infant - infancy is a normal stage of life. But Paul is not saying they were babes because they were newly born into the family of God, but because they were inexcusably immature.



- At the moment of salvation, a New Nature is poured in with the Old Nature, and from that moment onward a hostile coexistence begins.

Natural Man	Spiritual Man
One nature = the old, fleshly, fallen nature	Two natures = old nature + new, spiritual nature
Unsaved	Saved
At home in this world	An alien to this world
Independence from God	Submission to God

- The old nature is older than the new nature, and the old nature continues to grow even though the Christian's new nature is also progressing. The old nature is at home in the world and continues to learn new things. This produces more conflicts with the new nature.
- The word carnal describes the bridge that the old nature builds to reach out into worldliness. Fulfilling the desires of the old nature produces attitudes and behaviors that are in opposition to God's will.



- It is not the new nature that responds to temptation; it is the old nature. It is not the new nature that doubts; it is the old nature. It is not the new nature that experiences fear and depression; it is the old nature. The new nature does not use profanity, but the old nature does. It is not the new but the old nature that envies, covets, lies, and steals.
- Many Christians have encountered periods of time when it seemed impossible to cope with life. The key is not so much trying to completely escape loneliness, depression, guilt, or discouragement as it is understanding that these things are produced by the old nature. By understanding this truth, the new nature can call on the Lord for support and prevent it from overwhelming his outlook on life.
- The old nature does not give up the patterns that have been developed through the years. Those tendencies can be curbed only by the deliberate action of the new nature in obedience to the Word of God and the promptings of the indwelling Holy Spirit. However, the potential for the old nature's action will always be present.
- The believer who does have the ability to confess and forsake that sin, and to receive forgiveness and restoration from God. However, sin does have consequences, and believers who sin will certainly suffer the consequences associated with their sin.
- Paul makes it clear that he expected more of the Corinthians at this stage of their spiritual lives. They should have matured in ways that would allow them to control themselves and act in more spiritual ways than they were acting.

Their Prolonged Infancy (1 Cor 3:2)

- The proof of their prolonged infancy can be seen in their diet: milk rather than solid food.
- "I gave you milk" = this is parallel to "I speak" in the previous verse. When Paul speaks what God has revealed to him, this is the process of feeding others with the nourishment that the spiritual nature requires in order to grow and develop.
- Paul desired to feed their spiritual nature, but he was required to provide food that was appropriate to their level of spiritual development.

- We should focus on feeding the new nature, not the old – and we must feed it the most appropriate food for its health and growth. The old nature has plenty to feed upon in this world, but the new nature can only find nourishment in the Word of God and prayer.

The Evidence for Their Immaturity (1 Cor 3:3-4)

- “Fleshly” (*sarkikos*) = flesh-like; related to flesh; controlled by the flesh.
- When Paul directly addressed the Corinthians he said they were “flesh-like” – they were acting like people who were living only in the flesh. Notice that Paul never put them in the category of “Natural” men. These were believers who were acting like unbelievers.
- “Jealousy and strife” = listed in the works of the flesh in Gal 5:20.
 - Jealousy (*zelos*) = contentious rivalry, passion in pursuing or defending something.
 - Strife (*eris*) = contention, wrangling, quarreling (see 1 Cor 1:11).
- “Walking like (*kata*) mere men” = *according to* merely human motives or feelings; behaving like the “Natural” unsaved man would behave.
- Again, this connects with 1 Cor 1:11ff – Paul is still addressing the same issue of the causes of divisions within the Corinthian church. The Corinthians are allowing their old nature to dominate the new nature, and their behavior proves this.
- The spiritual nature can only grow by taking nourishment from God’s Word, prayer, and godly fellowship. Every believer needs to understand that the fleshly nature and the spiritual nature are part of the structure of his mind, will, emotions, and physical body. The conflict between the two natures goes on twenty-four hours a day, and it will continue until the rapture or death!

Points of Application

**Two natures beat within my breast: one is foul, the other blest;
The one I love, the one I hate; the one I feed will dominate.**

- We must feed our new nature so that it will grow and become strong. At the same time we should say “No!” to the old nature.
- The tragedy of these Corinthians is that they have allowed the spiritual nature to be overcome by the flesh, and they are living like natural men. This is a tremendous challenge from the apostle Paul to all Christians that our lives should be different!
- Spiritual maturity is the growth which the Holy Spirit produces over a period of time in the life of a believer. It is not the time itself that produces maturity, but the rate of spiritual growth can be increased if the new nature receives the proper spiritual food.
- Realize that there is a struggle in the life of every believer. It is very helpful to have a maturing Christian to whom you can talk about these issues. Other believers can help by providing encouragement, support, accountability, prayer, and partnership in Bible study.



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Our primary purpose is to uphold the truths of the Word of God.

I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:15)

Our primary responsibility is to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-12)