



## **NEW LIFE: In the Family**

***By: Peter Bales***

*No. 16, February 11th, 2024*

Romans 8:29 says, “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters” (NIV). Before time, God knew that he wanted his kids to be like Jesus- part of family! Brothers and sisters with Jesus!

Family is God’s idea. This important to realize and think about, especially as it applies to God’s children and church. It’s not an institution or government as much as it’s a family!

READ 1 Cor 12:12-20

Family is part of our Identity in Christ. So many people try to follow Jesus off by themselves, but we’re designed to do this together! Which part are you? An ear, perhaps? Are you the eye? Which would you rather be without! The point is that we each play a very different, yet important part in God’s family.

### **1. How is family different than an institution or business? What makes this difficult to do?**

Here’s a question to think about- What is it that makes us part of Christ’s family? Is it because we all read from the “right” version of the Bible? Is it because we all dress the same way for church? Is it because we worship in a particular building? Sometimes people talk about how disunified the church is because there are so many denominations. They’ll say, “Why does there have to be so many churches in one town?” They see it as disunity.

Of course, we have had our troubles, but what if the differences didn’t bring about disunity. Instead, it’s about God’s creative diversity!

Think about this. At Christmas we all celebrate in different ways. Some open presents on Christmas morning- other’s on Christmas eve- others don’t give presents at all! Some like to have all their families over and others go on missions trips. Some have very special traditions and others do it differently every year. It’s all beautiful because we are all celebrating Christmas in different ways. It’s not about how we celebrate- its about Jesus!

What if Sunday morning was the same? There are churches all over the world that celebrate in different ways, but they are our brothers and sisters if we are all celebrating Jesus. Jesus is the

key. He is the central figure in the gospel, and he is what defines our family. If you are a follower of Jesus, then we are family. Traditions and worship practices are important, but perhaps we overemphasize these differences and forget that we are all part of God's family.

READ what Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:1-6.

**2. How does Paul encourage us to handle our differences?**

Here's a way to visualize different ways we view our church family.

Some have an *IN/OUT Focus* that establishes a list of criteria to determine who is in and out. You don't belong unless you meet the criteria. You're either IN or OUT. There are rules to follow to stay in. There are standards to meet to be a part.

**3. Have you been part of a group that operates like this?  
What was your experience like?**

Instead, the Bible presents a different picture. We are *Jesus focused*. Jesus is the reason that we are family! Each person or church has a different understanding and relationship with God, but it's through Jesus that we become his children.

**4. How does a "Jesus Focus" change how we view family?**

Changing our focus doesn't mean that we abandon truth or that "all roads lead to Jesus." Hopefully, it helps us remain humble and able to learn from others who may have a different understanding of who Jesus is. We all have a lot more to learn because God is so big!

Jesus did many things, but over 300 times we read that Jesus asked questions. He knew all truth, yet he didn't just tell everyone what he knew all of the time. Instead, he *led* them to truth through questions and dialogue. This may be instructive to how we deal with diversity—stay curious and seek to understand.

Unity is not just political buzzword. Jesus wanted his children to be unified. Psalm 133:1 says, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" READ John 17:20-21.

- 5. What was Jesus praying for?**
- 6. What can we learn from how Jesus talked to people?**
- 7. What are practical ways to work toward unity rather than division?**

*GOING DEEPER> Read 1 Cor. 1:10-17. Think about Paul's rebuke of the Corinthians and how it might apply to the church today. Ask the Lord to increase your love for his diverse church.*

