

# energeia ministries

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## **POSITION PAPER: RACISM**

### **Preamble**

Energeia Ministries exists for the purpose of cultivating a biblical kingdom worldview, to represent Christ and His Gospel to others, and to glorify God in every dimension of life and so advance God's Kingdom on earth.

The Bible is our final authority for faith and practice, and it is our intent to have it govern all our teachings and relationships.

The Bible teaches that God created humans as one race. History, reality, and Scripture affirm that in that act of creation was the potential for great diversity, manifested today by the remarkable cultural diversity of humanity. Scripture also teaches that this beautiful, God-caused, and sustained diversity is divinely intended to incline mankind to seek the Lord and depend on Him for salvation from sin (Acts 17:24-28).

The true unity of humanity is found through faith in Christ alone for salvation from sin – in contrast to the superficial unity found in humanistic philosophies or political points of view. For those made new in Christ, all sinful social, cultural, and racial barriers are erased (Colossians 3:11), allowing the beauty of redeemed human unity in diversity to be demonstrated through the Church.

As believers, we are set free by Christ's redeeming grace to love God fully and to love our neighbour as ourselves, regardless of our neighbour's ethnicity or culture. As believers, we demonstrate our love for others first by presenting Christ our Great Saviour to every person, irrespective of ethnicity, culture, or national origin. This we do in obedience to Christ's final command to proclaim the Gospel to all men and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20). As believers we are also committed to demonstrating the love of Christ daily in our relationships with others, disregarding the divisions invented by sinful humanity (Luke 10:25-37; James 2:1-13).

Most of us, if not all of us, have been deeply impacted and influenced by our history of segregation and discrimination (apartheid) and its legacy. Consequently, in the past, our ethos regarding diversity was shaped more by that ethos than by the principles and precepts of the Scriptures. In so doing, we failed to accurately represent the Lord and to fulfil the commandment to love others as ourselves.

We have repented and continue to repent of our sin and are committed to the preaching and living of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the liberty that it brings to mankind.

## **Introduction**

From Genesis to Revelation, racism runs counter to everything Scripture teaches.

We must begin our opposition to racism with a biblical and theological analysis of the problem and with a biblical and theological presentation of the solution to the problem. We must carefully and critically evaluate every idea and belief in light of Scripture and under the authority of Scripture. We must reject ideologies and teachings that are contrary to Scripture.

God created humans in his image. The Bible speaks clearly about God's vision to restore everything Adam and Eve lost in the Garden of Eden and his vision to redeem ethnically diverse individuals from different tongues, tribes, peoples, and nations. (Genesis 3:15, Matthew 28:16-20, Revelation 5:9)

Through Christ's death and resurrection, God makes sinners right with himself (Romans 5:6-10), reconciles sinners to each other (Ephesians 2:11-22), and restores and reconciles the entire universe (Colossians 1:19-20). Paul calls this cosmic redemption the disarming of earthly and demonic powers (Colossians 2:14-15) and the unification of all things and all people in Christ.

Racism is opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ and against God's vision to redeem and unify creation through Christ. God recreates through Christ a diversity of different tongues, tribes, peoples, and nations into one new (but diverse) people. God commands us to live in pursuit of a reconciled community with one another and with our neighbours in anticipation of the age to come (Isaiah 65:17-25; Romans 8:19-22). God's kingdom is an already-and-not-yet kingdom. The kingdom is filled with diverse people and diverse stories of beautiful image-bearers who have tasted the salvation of the one God, the one Lord, and the one Spirit by faith in Christ (Ephesians 4:4-6).

## **Our Position**

We condemn racism. We stand together against all forms of racism and discrimination towards any person or community. No individual or ethnic group is greater or more valuable than another.

Racism is an affront to the value of individuals created in God's image and to the divinely designed diversity of redeemed humanity. This denial of personhood and belonging runs contrary to the peace and unity that God intended in the beginning and that the Bible depicts as our destiny.

Racism is more than a social problem. It is a sin, a moral and spiritual issue. Racism is a sin because it prevents those who harbour it in their attitudes and actions from obeying Christ's command to love our neighbour (Matt. 22:39). Our neighbour is any other human being (Luke 10:25-37). Racism is also a sin because it has its roots in pride and arrogance (Prov. 13:10; 16:18; Isa. 2:17). This sin originated in Lucifer's desire to elevate himself above the throne of God.

## Terminology - Race and Ethnicity

Is there a difference between *race* and *ethnicity*? The short answer is, Yes, but it is complicated. Use of the words overlap and are very historical and often personal. But very generally speaking, the word *race* involves shared physical characteristics, especially skin colour, and a shared ancestry or historical experience based on that, whereas *ethnicity* involves shared cultural or national identity, which may include language, nationality, religion, or other customs.

Our English word "race" is a subset of ethnicity, and today it is often associated in popular culture with skin colour and has been used to classify groups of people. Tragically, this has sometimes been used to argue that some people are superior and others inferior based on skin colour. We typically refer to people who advocate forms of ethno-supremacy as racists, racial supremacists, or racial nationalists. Shamefully, churches have embraced and advocated racism on occasion, even attempting to use the Bible to do so.

Scripture views humanity as a single race: "And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26). The Bible emphasises the unity of humanity as God's image bearers in both creation and redemption (Genesis 1:28, 5:1-2, 12:1-3; Matthew 28:19; Colossians 3:11; Revelation 5:9). The primary biblical subdivisions of humanity relate to ethnicity, which are a variety of commonly shared attributes; geographic location, geopolitical identity, dialect, and religion.

Genetically speaking, all of humanity is one race. Genetic research shows that humans across the globe are 99.8% genetically identical, most of the differing 0.2% has to do with gender and personalities. Physical differences involve only 0.012% of a person's genes. Even with the variations in skin colour and facial features, humans have only one race.

Adam and Eve had the genetic potential to produce a variety of skin tones and features. Noah and his family passed this along. At the Tower of Babel, God separated people into languages and nations (Genesis 10:32, 11:1-9). As people with the same language drew away into relative isolation, recessive genes would have been reinforced within the particular populations. Features would have grown more exaggerated until specific characteristics became easily identifiable.

Race as generally understood by most is a social construct. When most people think of race, they immediately picture skin colour. Race is also associated with other physical features such as hair, body type, lip size, and nose shape. The concept of race has been used to divide and oppress.

Skin colour proved to be an easy trait to differentiate between slave owners and slaves. Even after slavery was abolished, race served as a cultural and social barrier between people of African and Anglo descent. The close association between race and discrimination is a central storyline in our history.

The Bible affirms what science has subsequently supported. Even though different races exhibit different physical features, the differences have little biological significance. All human beings, no matter what their genetic traits, are part of the same race: the human race.

Because all humankind shares the same ancestral parentage, it refutes any conception of ontological inferiority. Throughout much of our history, racist men and women promulgated the myth that people of African descent were not only biologically different but also a deficient race.

The Bible teaches that all human beings are created in the image of God. The image of God in all people makes them equally worthy of dignity in the sight of God and all humankind. Racism not only disregards scientific facts but it also, more importantly, is a direct assault on the image of God in humanity.

The Bible directly and pervasively deals with sins related to ethnicity and race. Scripture confronts "peoples" and "nations" who view themselves as inherently superior to others based on distinctions of culture and identity. The biblical storyline highlights the constant post-Fall danger of using any of these distinctions as a form of sinful self-justification.

Issues related to ethnicity are fundamental, not incidental, to the unfolding gospel story in redemptive history. The city of Antioch during the days of Roman rule was divided into 18 different and intensely antagonistic ethnic groups with almost no social integration. It was the followers of Christ in the multi-ethnic church of Antioch who were first called Christians (Acts 11:19-26) and who took the gospel of Jesus Christ around the world (Acts 13:1-3). The Greco-Roman world stood in awe of the people who formerly hated each other because of ethnic distinctions and now loved each other as family, worshipping and serving together in the name of Jesus (John 13:35).

The gospel tears down all sinful, self-imposed barriers between God's image bearers and makes them one new man in Christ – the household of God (Ephesians 2:19). Gospel reconciliation is to be proclaimed and on display vertically (God-to-man) and horizontally (man-to-man) in local church congregations (Ephesians 2:11-22). We are to have the mind of Christ, which looks to the interests of others (Philippians 2:3-4). The "others" Paul mentions includes all categories of otherness, including ethnic and unfortunate racial distinctions. In Christ's kingdom, the ethnic majority has a responsibility to learn from, honour and be sensitive to the concerns of ethnic minorities.

A genuinely Christian attitude toward ethnic and racial diversity is not one of toleration, but celebration. The inclusion of ethnically diverse peoples in the Church is God's intention, fulfilling his gospel promise (Gen. 12, 15; Eph. 2, 4; Rev. 5, 7). The glory of the triumphantly consummated kingdom of Christ will be demonstrated by the multi-ethnic diversity of worshippers from every tribe, language, people, and nation.

In summary, from a biblical perspective, there is only one race, the human race, celebrating many ethnicities. All of mankind is equal in value and should be honoured because we all are created in the image of God.

## Defining Racism

Even though there are various definitions of racism, one definition should not be given preference to any other. They should rather be complementing one another, because they reflect the different aspects of racism and the different meanings attached to the concept of racism. We can take something from each of the following definitions to help us understand what racism is:

The English Oxford Living Dictionaries (2016)

'[p]rejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior'.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2014)

"a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capabilities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race"

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2016)

'poor treatment of or violence against people because of their race; the belief that some races of people are better than others'.

Wellman (1993:1203)

a 'system of advantage based on race'.

Memmi and Martinot (2000)

[Racism is] generalizing definition and valuation of differences, whether real or imaginary, to the advantage of the one defining or deploying them, and to the detriment of the one subjugated to the act of definition, whose purpose is to justify (social or physical) hostility and assault. (p. 100)

Van Soest and Garcia (2003:32, quoted by Hoyt 2012:229)

'[w]e view racism above all as a socio-political phenomenon that is characterized by social power.'

Wijeyesinghe, Griffin and Love (1997)

[T]he systematic subordination of members of targeted racial groups who have relatively little social power in the United States (Blacks, Latinos/as, Native Americans, and Asians), by the members of the agent racial group who have relatively more social power (Whites).

This subordination is supported by the actions of individuals, cultural norms and values, and the institutional structures and practices in society. (pp. 88-89)

Della-Dora (1970)

'[r]acism is different from racial prejudice, hatred, or discrimination. Racism involves having the power to carry out systematic discriminatory practices through the major institutions of our society.'

Ridley (2005)

Racism is any behaviour or pattern of behaviour that tends to systematically deny access to opportunities or privileges to members of one racial group while allowing members of another racial group to enjoy those opportunities or privileges.

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (160 Countries agreed on the definition of Racism as):

Any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise, on equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, or any other field of public life.

Early Years Trainer's Anti-Racist Network Manual (Darbyshire 1994:9)

An unjust situation, in which a group because of its unequal place in society, suffers from a persistent pattern of prejudice, exclusion, injustice, discrimination and disadvantage which are slow to change and rooted deep in the institutions and structure of society and in people's psyches.

Gradwell (2016)

Racism is the belief that one's own cultural heritage is innately superior to that of others. It is prejudice, discrimination, intolerance, or antagonism directed against someone of a different people group. It consists of ideologies and practices that seek to justify, or cause, the unequal distribution of privileges or rights. Its existence unfairly benefits some and burden others simply due to the colour of their skin and the cultural associations based upon perceptions of race. When accompanied and sustained by imbalances of power, prejudice moves beyond individual relationships to institutional practices. Such racial injustice is the systemic perpetuation of racism.

Du Rand, Vorster, Vorster (2017)

Racism is any behaviour or system that tends to systematically deny access to opportunities or privileges to members of one racial group, while allowing members of another racial group to enjoy those opportunities or privileges. This includes any attitude or discriminatory practice perpetrated by the institutional structures of society which subordinate a person or group because of their colour or ethnic lineage.

Racial discrimination is not confined to any single race.

It is important to draw a distinction between racism, racial prejudice, and racial discrimination. Racism is the belief that some races of people are better than others, and racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race. Racial prejudice is a negative attitude towards a group of people based on race, arising from race-based stereotypes. Racial discrimination is when a person is treated less favourably than another person in a similar situation because of their race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin.

Ethnic differences are often seen as a difficulty to overcome rather than a gift from God to be treasured. Ethnic differences are not the problem. Prejudice and racism inject our differences with the sinful notion that our differences leads to superiority and inferiority or the distorted belief that our differences are merely cultural cues for determining who is in and who is out, rather than emblems of God's gift of diversity. Ethnic differences have been successfully used either to build up or tear down communities and neighbourhoods.

The purpose of this paper is to deal with racism and the consequent challenge it poses to the Christian church in general. Because mission always involves the crossing of ethnic and cultural boundaries, it is important that the issues related to ethnicity and racism be addressed and put into the biblical perspective.

So why do people hold racist attitudes? Three reasons are: feelings of pride, feelings of inferiority, and feelings of fear. Pride and arrogance fuel racism. When we are proud of who we are, we can easily look down upon those who are different from us and do not manifest the same characteristics that we do. We can start believing we are superior to another person or race.

Racism, however, can come from the opposite end of the emotional spectrum: inferiority. We may not feel good about ourselves. So, in order to feel good about ourselves, we disparage another person or race.

Racism also results from fear. We fear what we do not understand. We fear what is strange and foreign. Racial and cultural differences may even seem dangerous to us. Racial attitudes can surface if we do not seek to know and understand those who are different from us.

We should stand strong against racism and racist attitudes wherever we find them: in society, in individuals, and within the church.

## **A Biblical Theology of Unity in Diversity**

Diversity (regarding race, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, class, and geographic identity) deeply affects faithful Christian living and influences effective missions and evangelism outreach.

We choose to build into our mission of advancing God's Kingdom a strong commitment to biblical diversity.

This raises a critical question: Why do we pursue the principles of diversity? Is this enthusiasm for diversity just a symptom of political correctness? Or is the passion for diversity truly an

expression of our commitment to God's Word? And is the emphasis on diversity deeply and organically connected to the gospel?

The purpose of this position paper is not only to address the specific events or cultural issues of the current moment. The challenge and pain of current events is undeniable, and a biblically informed and pastorally sensitive response is desperately needed. The purpose of this paper, however, is to offer a broader biblical justification and a theological account of our commitment to unity in diversity.

## **God's Creational Vision**

"In the beginning," God created a world where he would reign as King. Although God created a large mass in the first step of creation – "formless and empty" (Genesis 1:2) – he immediately began dividing this mass into polar opposites. He divided day from night, land from sea, plants from animals, animals from humans and male human from female human.

God's creation vision does not stop with division, however. It also includes unity. The clearest example of this is gender. While God created man and woman different, he created both in his own image. God intended that these polar opposites would relate to each other in peace and harmony. This is the principle of "unity in diversity."

The Hebrew word that captures real diversity coming together in harmonious unity is *shalom*. *Shalom* means peace, well-being, and joy – nothing broken and nothing lacking. *Shalom* happens when all things are rightly ordered under God's leadership. The hope for "peace on earth" is found principally in the Kingdom, because *shalom* results from God's loving Kingship over all things.

The principle of "unity in diversity" mirrors the inner life of the Triune God. God's creational vision (a world that is incredibly diverse yet unified in peace-filled relationships) reflects the Trinity. The Triune God is diverse (three persons), but unified (one God).

The highest earthly expression of "unity in diversity" is biblical marriage (see Ephesians 5:21-35). Marriage is beautiful diversity – man and woman – joined in compelling unity – "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

## **Dangers of the Contemporary Ideological Approach**

Some are concerned that all interest in diversity comes from "political correctness."

It is important to see, however, that the biblical approach to diversity will differ from a secular, ideological or political approach. Often, in political correctness, group identity is paramount. Group loyalty is the highest good. Each group gains its sense of well-being and maintains its identity as a group by putting itself over or against another group. Tribal loyalties determine a person's values, attitudes, political loyalties, behaviours, and lifestyle. One lives out the idea that "my identity community is ultimate for me."



Because ideological commitments are held regardless of reasoned arguments, they encourage groups to fight against each other. Instead of discussing their views based on a common set of evidence, ideologues compete for power and attention. So ideological approaches tend to degenerate into battles between interest groups. Each group tries to gain political power and economic advantage over other groups. Political correctness encourages people to fight for their group, rather than seek the common good.

From a Christian theological perspective, obviously, this ideological approach is deeply flawed.

Firstly, an ideological approach connects one's very identity with a human diversity characteristic. It divides the world into "haves" and "have nots." Whole communities define themselves in these polarities, so they are not motivated to bring black and white into unity. For this reason, it cannot create a vision for unity. To seek unity is to betray one's tribe (whether white or black).

Secondly, from a biblical point of view, connecting a person's deepest identity with a human diversity characteristic is problematic. If one's ultimate loyalty is to a humanly defined group, then that person's ultimate loyalty can never be to Jesus. For Christians, saying that a person's deepest identity is a human group membership rather than identity in Christ, is idolatrous.

A theology of diversity can have nothing in common with an ideological approach to diversity. God created a beautiful diversity of opposites, and he intends the opposites to relate to each other harmoniously. And wherever this unity in diversity is lived out under God's loving leadership, *shalom* is present. But *shalom* is the very opposite of the conflict between groups that political correctness fosters. A biblical approach to commonly identified diversity categories such as ethnicity and gender does recognise the full weight of difference. It does *not* seek to forcefully blend one group into another. (For example, God created men and women uniquely different.) A biblical approach also deals honestly with the injustice caused by friction between groups in a fallen world. And it holds up a vision for healthy, respectful, well-ordered relationships between diverse groups. (In the example of marriage, God intended that men and women relate positively in love.)

## **Toward a Biblical Approach**

The biblical approach is completely unlike political approaches. Political approaches seek to create conflict and competition for power and resources. These approaches encourage different groups to seek power so they can compete, gain leverage over each other and defeat each other.

By contrast, the biblical approach develops a model of reciprocal equality and loving justice. It recognises that every person and each community gain their identity from God. Each person and every community stand under the sovereign Lordship of Christ. By seeking the *shalom* that God intended, a biblical approach not only recognizes true differences and their very real consequences, but it also seeks out genuine relationship and mutuality.

## The Curse of Sin

Rebellion against God disrupted the *shalom* of God's creation. Clearly, Adam and Eve's choice to disobey destroyed their intimacy with God (Genesis 3:7). No longer did our first parents walk with God in the cool of the evening (Genesis 3:8). They both suffered when the curse of sin infected important activities – for Adam, tilling the land, and for Eve, giving birth (Genesis 3:16-19).

But the implications of the curse of sin go much further. Not only did Adam and Eve become individually separated from God and experience hardship in their lives, but soon sin touched Cain and Abel as one brother murdered another.

Eventually, every part of the created world became cursed as the impact of sin rippled out in widening circles, and God's whole creation became subject to futility. And this refers not simply to the physical universe, but to the social and cultural universes as well. At a low point it is said that "every thought of every person is only evil all the time" (Genesis 6:5). Soon, God despaired and prepared a flood to stop the onslaught of evil.

The curse infected the diversity of God's world. The impact of sin on the dynamics within and between different peoples and societies was profoundly important. In the Babel story, it becomes clear that the nations, the *ethne*, cannot live in *shalom*. Instead, they are driven away from each other. At every level – intrapersonal, interpersonal, intercultural – *shalom* is broken.

Today, the insights of various areas of empirical study shed light on the theological reality that human societies live under the curse. Significant research shows how diverse groups in many cultures experience life very differently. Some groups experience advantage; other groups experience disadvantage. For example, in the U.S. today, the likelihood of jail time for the same offense differs dramatically depending on the defendant's skin colour. In Africa, access to well-paying employment differs markedly depending on tribal membership.

The prophets emphatically announce God's judgment on Israel's upper class for treating the poor with contempt. Without a commitment to God's standards of justice and mercy, sinful humans tend to seek advantage over others, to treat others unjustly and to oppress others whenever they can accumulate enough power to do so.

Empirical research also shows remarkable ways people tend to give preferential treatment to "their own kind." Social psychology speaks, for example, about "ingroup" and "outgroup" behaviour. When observing members in their own group doing wrong behaviours, many people excuse the person and blame circumstances. But when they see those in other groups doing exactly the same behaviours, they blame the character of those persons.

Historically, many Christians have disrupted these common sinful patterns. And yet many other Christians have become captive to sinful cultural ways. Christians often failed to live up to their highest ideals regarding diversity categories. The most horrific example in history is the condoning of race-based slavery. Certainly, abolitionists opposed slavery very specifically because of their faith in Christ. And yet for every abolitionist, there was a self-proclaimed Christian owned slave.

Today, a wealth of evidence indicates that how a person, family or community experiences life is greatly affected by their relationship to different diversity categories. This is an outworking of the impact of the curse on human society. Current issues of race and ethnicity have very different impacts on different members of our church family. This means that members of some groups naturally have greater access to property, employment, education, or political influence. And these differences have important effects as people consider whether to trust in Christ or worship in our churches. The question of how the church responds to the inequities related to diversity is important for ministry. While, in faithfulness to the Scripture, churches have often been compelled to take stands that were very unpopular with the broader public, the church's insensitive and sometimes uninformed response to diversity issues, especially to issues of race and ethnicity, directly and unnecessarily negatively affect the willingness of people who are far from God to choose to follow Jesus.

Christians around the world have succumbed to injustice driven by diversity factors. Christians, some in ignorance and others in obstinance, have condoned government corruption, ineffective legal systems, a lack of respect for property rights and tribal or ethnic conflict. These conditions condemn some groups to a marginal existence at best, while other groups enjoy long-term advantages. Injustice due to class, race, ethnicity, age, disability, or gender is rampant in our nation and world. And this creates significant pastoral and social challenges.

In summary, in every society around the world, some groups have advantages and other groups suffer disadvantages. The rich have power over the poor. Men exercise control over women. The skilful take advantage of the disabled. Everywhere, there is injustice and oppression, whether great or small. These are all examples of sin disrupting the beautiful *shalom* God created. Where all things were once in proper relationships and well-ordered under God's loving leadership, now all relationships are broken by sin and marred by unhealth. Spouses, families, tribes, and whole cultures cannot get along. The implications of sin do include the separation of individual persons from God. This separation from God spills over into every other area of human interaction. And it spreads out even into the disruption of the physical universe. The impact of the curse of sin is complete.

### **The Promise and Fulfilment of Reconciliation**

God called Abram and promised to bless him (Genesis 12:1-3). In one sense, this was unremarkable for that time in history. Many tribes in Abram's time believed their gods wanted to bless them. But then God promised that through Abram, he would also bless all the peoples – all the *ethne* – of the world. This is remarkable. No one in Abram's time thought this way.

God intended, through Abram and Abram's seed, to reverse the total effects of the curse. Of course, God purposed to rescue individual sinners and to reconcile them to himself. This is central to the gospel. But then God also determined that through the plan he instituted with Abram, he would also address the other effects of sin. He would bring healing within families, restoration between classes and peace among societies. And he would even overturn the physical effects of sin on the earth itself (Romans 8:22).

How this reconciliation of all things under Christ will occur is a great mystery (Ephesians 1:9). But clearly, God's wider purpose in Christ is to "bring all things in heaven and on earth together

under one head, even Christ" (Ephesians 1:10). God's plan of redemption clearly includes the salvation of those individuals who trust in Christ (Ephesians 1:11-14). But God's plan includes the restoration of other things too. "All things," not just in heaven but on earth as well, are included somehow. This is the full blossom of God's reign, the Kingdom of God (Ephesians 1:10).

To be clear, when Paul says God will bring "all things" under Christ's authority, he is not teaching universalism (the idea that all persons are eventually saved). In bringing everything in heaven and on earth into his redemptive plan, God clearly places Christ in a position of authority over the defeated forces of evil. Christ is seated at God's right hand, "far above all rule and authority, power and dominion" (Ephesians 1:21). In this culmination of God's plan, *shalom* is restored, and those who insist on fighting against God are banished. God reigns through Christ. Those who exercise repentance and faith in Christ join his Kingdom. Evil and the Evil One are vanquished. And all things are properly ordered under Christ as they should be.

Paul describes God's plan to restore the *shalom* of all things. He first clearly teaches that all who trust in Christ receive salvation "by grace through faith" (Ephesians 2:8, 9). This is core to the plan. He then goes on to describe another aspect of God's plan. God declares that a central part of his restoration purpose is to "create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace" (Ephesians 2:15, NIV). The ESV says God will "create in him one new man in place of the two, so making peace" (Ephesians 2:15, ESV). Clearly, Paul is not saying God will create new individual human persons. For the "New Humanity" or "New Man" is created "in place of the two," and "the two" are people groups, Jew, and Gentile. Paul is teaching that God is creating a unified body of humans, a "New Humanity." This unified body (Ephesians 2:16) is the church, the body of those unified in Christ.

Significantly, Paul speaks specifically of the formation of this body as a reconciliation between two different ethnic groups, Jew, and Gentile. Formerly, humanity was divided into circumcised and uncircumcised. The uncircumcised were excluded from citizenship in the Kingdom (Ephesians 1:12) and did not enjoy access to the benefits of God's promises. Through the blood of Christ, however, those who were formerly "far away" have now "come near" (Ephesians 1:13). That is, through the redemptive work of Christ, not only were the sins of individuals nailed to the cross, but the barrier between ethnic groups – the "dividing wall of hostility" – was destroyed as well. Through the cross, individuals are reconciled to God and groups are reconciled to each other. Two groups, each composed of saved individuals, become one people (Ephesians 1:14).

The theological application of this concept of the church as the New Humanity extends past the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. The principle is that dividing walls of hostility of whatever sort are overcome in one body. But the division of Jews and Gentiles is an ethnic and racial divide, and so, by application, the healing of other racial and ethnic divisions is implied in this principle.

But beyond that, another application can be that the divisions of class, which support, for example, the clear rejection of partiality in the love feast (1 Corinthians 11:17-34), are also overcome. And any other divisions caused by diversity among people are challenged by the vision of becoming one in Christ.

Significantly, Paul clearly uses the label “this gospel” (Ephesians 3:7) to refer to this message about the one body. That those of various ethnic groups are “heirs,” “members of one body” and “sharers together in the promise” – all of this is achieved by what Paul calls “the gospel” (Ephesians 3:6). Jesus came announcing the gospel, the Good News, that by sending the Son, the Father was inaugurating his reign. He was launching the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15). The coming of Christ and the fulfilment of his mission in crucifixion and resurrection meant that God’s work of bringing all things under his reign had begun in a new way. Jesus lived out Kingdom values in how he treated the underprivileged of his day. He ministered to Samaritans. He taught women. And he ate with the poor. Clearly, he was breaking down social barriers practiced in first-century Palestine.

Jesus prayed these Kingdom values at the end of his earthly mission, famously asking the Father that “all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you” (John 17:21). This prayer will find its fulfilment when the unified body of Christ, from “every tribe and tongue,” gathers to worship the Lamb in the next life.

In summary, the Good News is this: Through the Kingdom of God inaugurated in Jesus, the impacts of the curse – including the sin and alienation of individuals from God as well as the divisions and hostilities among people groups – will be fully reversed. This great reversal starts when individual sinners receive forgiveness and are restored to God. As these individual sinners are redeemed and formed into one unified body in Christ, they live out the new ethic of love. And this life of the Kingdom, lived before the world, propels the reversal out into corporate human relationships. Empowered by the Spirit, God’s work of renewal continues branching out until the entire cosmos comes under the loving leadership of God.

### **Implications for Ethics and Mission**

The implications of this theology for ethics and mission should be clear. Paul urges his readers to “live a life worthy of the calling” (Ephesians 4:1). The fact that there is now “one body,” “one Spirit,” “one hope,” “one Lord,” “one God and Father of us all” (Ephesians 4:4, 5) means we are to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit” (Ephesians 4:3). All the moral instruction that follows builds on the unquestionable premise: All believers, regardless of the ethnic or other diversity factors, are part of the one body. Therefore, all must imitate God and live in love (Ephesians 5:1, 2). The whole of Christian ethics flows out of the theological affirmation that God is building his Kingdom and expanding his reign of love. This happens as the church lives out Paul’s remarkable vision of “being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind” (Philippians 2:2).

Paul also teaches that the unity of the body directly affects service and mission. In the church, there is unity among people of all backgrounds, but there is also a variety of gifts (Ephesians 4:11- 13). Citizens of this Kingdom are challenged to live out their various callings. This includes those who build up the body and those who spread the gospel. When each person does his or her part, the reign of God is extended and the rule of *shalom* made complete. The work of the church in teaching the Bible, discipling believers, evangelising the lost, serving the needy and caring for the poor is very simply the outworking of the Spirit’s grace given to each and every Kingdom citizen (Ephesians 4:7).

How does the church live out this theological principle in the 21st century?

Clearly, the world we live in today is struggling to resolve issues of diversity and to overturn the injustices that flow from them. And this situation creates unprecedented missional opportunity.

God intends the church of Jesus Christ to be the living expression of the work of Christ in breaking down the "dividing wall of hostility." If the church steps up as the living embodiment of a solution to our world's crisis of division and injustice, it will create new opportunities to change lives and transform culture.

In doing this, the church will be doing again what it has done before. The early church garnered the respect of its neighbours in exactly this way. History is full of evidence that when the church lives out God's purpose for unity, it transforms culture. Believers' concrete acts of justice and compassion showed that the church is on a mission for *shalom*. Unbelievers flocked to hear the whole gospel message when they saw that the gospel lived out truly transformed culture. When the church truly lives out its identity as the New Humanity, it can create a deflection point that interrupts negative cultural trends and initiates positive social transformation.

In summary, the redemptive plan of God announced to Abram and fulfilled in Christ's death and resurrection is not simply a rescue plan designed to pluck individuals out of an imploding world. It is a cosmic restoration plan. In this plan, the salvation of individuals is part of a bigger agenda that includes creating a new, unified people of God. This body of people will become a "whole building [that] is joined together" and will "rise to become a holy temple in the Lord" (Ephesians 2:21). This temple, a body of people in whom a dividing line of hostility is broken down, is the dwelling place of God. Of course, this vision is incomplete. The church now lives in the in-between, the time after the plan is launched and before it is complete, when God is at work through the church to bring all things under Christ.

### **The Culmination of God's Plan**

The trajectory for the church that Paul lays out so clearly in Ephesians should be clear. God is creating a people for his own name, a body that includes peoples who were formerly divided and are now unified in Christ. This trajectory points toward a completion described in Revelation. John describes a "new heaven and a new earth." The "Holy City, the new Jerusalem" descends from heaven (Revelation 21:1, 2). And now the fellowship of God with humanity is completely restored (Revelation 21:3). And when the church worships its Creator and Redeemer, that worship gloriously unites the voices of "every nation, tribe, people and language" (Revelation 7:9). What the church experiences today is intended to foreshadow that day.

We choose to become part of a diverse body of believers truly unified in Christ.

### **This vision for unity in diversity flows from God's plan for the ages.**

God built "unity in diversity" into the creation. This is pictured quintessentially in Christian marriage, a loving unity of gender opposites. The Evil One, who puts people against each other and against God, sabotages this unity. As God battles the Evil One, he promises blessing not only for the Jews, but for all the peoples of the earth. As Paul teaches, God intends unity in

diversity to blossom in the church. This blossoming of unity in Christ, despite all kinds of difference, is entirely uncommon in a fallen world. But in the church (not in the fallen world), the dividing wall of hostility between peoples is broken down. Two become one to the glory of the Father's name.

This unity, brought into being by Christ's death and resurrection, has weighty implications for the church's mission if we put "unity in diversity" as a high value, goal, and vision.

A commitment to genuine love of diverse neighbours combined with a counter-cultural strategy of diverse people reaching diverse people will propel God's mission for us a family of churches and bring more people into God's Kingdom.

## Practical Actions - Individually and Collectively

1. **We need to take an accurate assessment of ourselves.** Often our assumptions and predispositions affect the way we perceive and even treat others. A person who says he or she has no prejudices is probably in denial. All of us perceive the world differently and find it easier to accept people who are like us and harder to understand people who are different from us. Our cultural worldview affects how we perceive others. It affects how we evaluate what others think and what others do. So, an important first step in becoming more culturally sensitive is to evaluate ourselves.
2. **Do not consider yourself superior to another.** One of the root causes of racism is a belief in racial superiority. Paul tell us in Romans 12:3 that a man should not "think more highly of himself than he ought to think." Differences in culture should never be used to justify feelings of superiority which can lead to racist attitudes.
3. **Learn to withhold judgment.** Tolerance (in the biblical sense of the word) is a virtue we should cultivate. We should be willing to put aside our critical thinking and judgment until we know someone better. Taking the time to listen and understand the other person will help build bridges and dismantle barriers that often separate and isolate cultures.
4. **Develop cross cultural traits.** A missionary who goes overseas must learn to develop personal traits that will make him or her successful in a new and different culture. Likewise, we should develop these traits so that we can reach across a cultural divide. Friendliness and open communication are important. Flexibility and open-mindedness are also important. Developing these traits will enhance our ability to bridge a cultural gap.
5. **Open yourself to growth.** The purpose of this position paper is to share a bigger vision of God's plan for the church. God is not just saving individuals and getting them off the planet and into heaven. God is also forming them into a people who will honour his name here. He is creating this unified body of old and young, women and men, rich and poor, from every corner of the globe, from "every tribe and tongue," to glorify him forever. If you are truly open to God's work in the world, you will open yourself to this vision. And embracing this vision

might require more than learning new data. It might require allowing the Spirit to carry you along on a journey of transformational spiritual growth.

6. **Establish new relationships.** A deep relationship with someone who is different than you is transformational. Some believers have no real relationships with people who are not just like them. And some people seem to assume that a deep relationship between two people requires that these two be similar. But notice that God's plan for marriage is between a man and a woman – and the two genders are quite different! If you believe in biblical marriage, then you already accept that, from God's perspective, real relationship does not require sameness.
7. **Practice empathetic listening.** Deep friends talk about hard topics. True friends do not avoid tough issues and chat only about the weather. In fact, if two very different people are to build a deep and meaningful relationship, they have to gain mutual understanding. Let us face it: Given how our culture is evolving, people in different camps today simply do not understand each other. In such a context, the challenge is to listen – carefully, nonjudgmentally, authentically, and empathetically. We might want to take a step back from strongly held views and listen to our friends. This does *not* mean agreeing that everything someone else says is true – your views and their views are both limited and flawed. But imagine what we would experience if we simply listened, without interrupting, to those whose life experience has taught them things we have never learned?
8. **Cultivate a humble learning posture.** When people listen, without interrupting, to things that are difficult to hear, they give their friend an enormous gift. It is hard to listen when we might not agree. But this is where learning might happen – if we are humble enough to listen first and speak second. Can we admit upfront that not one of us knows all there is to know about any subject? This is especially true about a subject as intellectually complicated and emotionally charged as diversity.
9. **Search the Scriptures.** Once we develop a relationship with a friend whose life experience has taught them things we have never considered before, we will want to act like the Bereans. As Paul taught them new things, the Bereans "received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11). New human experiences do *not* add new truth to the Scriptures. But experiences of diversity do enable Scripture readers to see things they formerly overlooked. The challenge is to lay aside what we think we know and read the Bible with fresh eyes.
10. **Choose to act.** Actions speak louder than words. If we reach across boundaries of diversity in counter-cultural ways, they show that the message of God's love and forgiveness is more than words. Action, real, sacrificial, counter-cultural, difference-making action – this is what is needed. It is needed in each of the diversity categories of gender, ethnicity, age, disability, class, and geographical identity. And given our history, it is especially needed in the areas of race and ethnicity. Hostility, conflict, misunderstanding, self-centeredness, greed, aggression – especially around race and ethnicity – all of these and more characterise the times we live in. We, the people of God, are choosing to embrace biblical diversity as part of doing God's will and building God's Kingdom.



11. **Take a stand.** We should not tell (or allow others to tell) racial and ethnic jokes. These are demeaning to others and perpetuate racism and racial attitudes. Instead we should be God's instrument in bringing about racial reconciliation. We should seek to build bridges and close the racial and cultural divide between people groups and reach out with the love of Jesus Christ.
12. **Diversity Training.** We are on mission 24/7. We meet and encounter people every day at our places of work and the communities we live in. These people are from diverse backgrounds and cultures. It is therefore essential that every follower of Jesus be fully trained and equipped to love and understand those who are different to us. We encourage churches to develop the necessary training material and provide practical learning opportunities. We encourage churches to confront and root out any form of racism in its communities and in the hearts of its members.

## **Our Commitment**

We have a deep, principled, unshakeable commitment to our God given mission to reach the nations (every tribe and tongue) with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and disciple them to follow Jesus and live the life he called us to live. As God transforms our hearts and the hearts of the men and women we reach for Christ, so begins their personal transformation. And as many men and women come to Christ, so begins the transformation of families, communities, cities, and nations. Our primary mission is to see multitudes come to faith and bow the knee to Jesus Christ. The manifestation of the Kingdom of God on a broad scale will follow, filling the earth with the *shalom* of God. This is not a quick fix, but full-blown recreation from the inside out, one life at a time. Let this be increasingly evident in and through us!