

## Unity in Diversity: Race, Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Disability, Class and Geographic Identity in Biblical Perspective

### A Theological Position Paper, Converge Biblical Diversity Ministry

“Diversity” has far-reaching implications at this moment in history of the North American church. Diversity (regarding race, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, class and geographic identity) deeply affects faithful Christian living and influences effective missions and evangelism outreach. Converge is choosing to build into its mission of starting and strengthening churches with a strong commitment to biblical diversity. This raises a critical question: Why is Converge pursuing 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 Converge’s commitment to the Bible? And is the emphasis on diversity deeply and organically connected to the gospel? The purpose of this position paper is not 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 Converge’s commitment to 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” (Gen. 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. *Shalom* happens when all things are rightly ordered under God’s leadership. The Christmas 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) actually 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 Eph. 5:21-35). Marriage is beautiful diversity — man and woman — joined in compelling unity — “one flesh” (Gen. 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.

So what is an ideological approach? In general, an ideology is a set of beliefs, often in the political arena. Often people hold their “ideology” with a loyalty that does not allow for counter-evidence. So, in their minds, an ideology is “unfalsifiable” — advocates hold their view no matter what evidence may say. When a position is held ideologically, “our cause” cannot be questioned. The “rightness of our cause” reigns supreme and takes precedence over truth, justice, mercy and love.

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 pitting itself over or against another group. Tribal loyalties determine a person’s values, attitudes, political loyalties, behaviors 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. First, 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).

Second, 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 race, class or gender does recognize the full weight of difference. It does *not* seek to blend one group into another. (For example, God created men and women truly 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**

But 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 with each other, gain leverage over each other and defeat each other.

By contrast, the biblical approach develops a model of reciprocal equality and loving justice. It recognizes that every person and each community gains their identity from God. Each person

and every community stands 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 (Gen. 3:7). No longer did our first parents walk with God in the cool of the evening (Gen. 3:8). And they both suffered when the curse of sin infected important activities — for Adam, tilling the land, and for Eve, giving birth (Gen. 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" (Gen. 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 color. 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" behavior. When observing members in their own group doing wrong behaviors, many people excuse the person and blame circumstances. But when they see those in other groups doing exactly the same behaviors, 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 American 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, a self-proclaimed Christian owned slaves.

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 the Converge family. In America, 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.

As in America, 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 sum, 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 skillful 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 Fulfillment of Reconciliation**

God called Abram and promised to bless him (Gen. 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. It has to be revelation. 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 (Rom. 8:22).

How this reconciliation of all things under Christ will occur is a great mystery (Eph. 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" (Eph. 1:10). God's plan of redemption clearly includes the

salvation of those individuals who trust in Christ (Eph. 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 (Eph. 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" (Eph. 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" (Eph. 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" (Eph. 2:15, NIV). The ESV says God will "create in him one new man in place of the two, so making peace" (Eph. 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 (Eph. 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 (Eph. 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" (Eph. 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 (Eph. 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 Cor 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” (Eph. 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” (Eph. 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 (Mk. 1:14-15). The coming of Christ and the fulfillment 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” (Jn. 17:21). This prayer will find its fulfillment when the unified body of Christ, from “every tribe and tongue,” gathers to worship the Lamb in the next life.

In sum, 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” (Eph. 4:1). The fact that there is now “one body,” “one Spirit,” “one hope,” “one Lord,” “one God and Father of us all” (Eph. 4:4, 5) means we are to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit” (Eph. 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 (Eph. 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” (Phil. 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 (Eph. 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, evangelizing 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 (Eph. 4:7).

How does the church in America live out this theological principle in the 21st century? **Clearly, America today is struggling to resolve issues of diversity and to overturn the injustices that flow from them. And this situation creates unprecedented missional opportunity.** Any organization or movement that can speak a message and live a lifestyle that overcomes the “dividing wall of hostility” in our nation is counter-cultural. It will arouse intense curiosity. 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.” And if the church — if the Converge movement — can live out God’s purpose, it will add fuel to the fire of church planting and strengthening, evangelism and missions. If the church steps up as the living embodiment of a solution to America’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 neighbors in exactly this way. History is full of evidence that when the church lives out God's purpose for unity, it transforms culture. For example, when the plague hit the Greco-Roman world in 165 and 251, one-third of the population died. In the face of the threat, pagan leaders fled. But Christians did what they always did: They stayed and cared for their neighbors. History shows that Christian compassion reduced the death rate by two-thirds among those fortunate enough to be cared for by Christians. Not surprisingly, many people who survived the plague because of Christian care later flocked to the church. Believers' concrete acts of justice and compassion showed that the church is on a mission for *shalom*. Pagans 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 actually create a deflection point that interrupts negative cultural trends and initiates positive social transformation.

In sum, 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" (Eph. 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's 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 (Rev. 21:1, 2). And now the fellowship of God with humanity is completely restored (Rev. 21:3). And when the church worships its Creator and Redeemer, that worship gloriously unites the voices of "every nation, tribe, people and language" (Rev. 7:9). What the church experiences today is intended to foreshadow that day.

### The Church Responds Today

Converge chooses to become a diverse body of believers truly unified in Christ. Identity politics, in which special interest groups compete against each other for political power and economic advantage, is not the impetus for this vision. **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 pits 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, in spite of 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. Converge exists to “start and strengthen churches together worldwide.” If Converge — its leaders, people, churches and districts — puts “unity in diversity” as a high value and goal in its vision to start and strengthen churches, that will increase its success. First, prioritizing this vision for a truly and obviously unified body as a priority of its work will in itself fulfill a divine purpose. Second, further emphasizing this vision of unity in diversity will lend credibility to its teaching. **A surprising commitment to genuine love of diverse neighbors combined with a counter-cultural strategy of diverse people reaching diverse people can propel God's mission for Converge and bring more people into God's Kingdom.** “Love your neighbor as yourself” *must* lead to diversity.

If this vision of a unified body of diverse peoples unified in Christ's love is compelling, how can it be lived out? What concrete actions might you — the leaders, people, churches and districts of Converge — personally and corporately consider in order to live out this vision?

First, ***open yourself to growth***. The purpose of this position paper is to share a bigger vision of God's plan for the church. God isn't just saving individuals and getting them off the planet and into heaven. God is also forming them into a people who will honor his name here. He is

creating this unified body of old and young, women and men, black and white, 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.

Second, **establish new relationships**. A deep relationship with someone who is different than you is transformational. Some believers have no real relationships with people who aren’t just like them. And some people seem to assume that a deep relationship between two people requires that these two be very similar. But notice that God’s plan for marriage is between a man and a woman — and the two genders are very different! If you believe in biblical marriage, then you already accept that, from God’s perspective, real relationship does not require sameness. Embracing a genuine relationship means you’ll have skin in the game. *After all, it’s easier to ignore the issues of diversity if no one we know is suffering because of them.* So the challenge is to take a step toward a diverse relationship with someone who isn’t like you. Admittedly, risking that first step to connect might feel like the young lad asking for a first date. Scary! But the rewards will be great.

Third, **practice empathetic listening**. Deep friends talk about hard topics. True friends don’t avoid tough issues and chat only about the weather. Superficial talk gets boring. In fact, if two very different people are to build a deep and meaningful relationship, they have to gain mutual understanding. Let’s face it: Given how our culture is evolving, people in different camps today simply don’t understand each other. In such a context, the challenge is to listen — carefully, nonjudgmentally, authentically and empathetically. People today try to shout over each other. 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, imagine how startling and counter-cultural it would be, if we simply listened, without interrupting, to those whose life experience has taught them things we’ve never learned?

Fourth, **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’s 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 no 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. There's a difference between being *learned* (learning is complete) and being a *learner* (learning is ongoing). It's wise to give yourself permission to learn new things every day. Growth, after all, requires change. And refusing to understand new things is the equivalent of choosing stagnation.

Fifth, ***search the Scriptures***. Once we develop a relationship with a friend whose life experience has taught them things we've 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.

Sixth, ***understand the times***. The men of Issachar, it is said, "understood the times and knew what Israel should do" (1 Chron. 12:32). What are our times like? North America is becoming more secular, and the vision of God's *shalom* — all things rightly ordered under God's loving leadership — falls on deaf ears. It's becoming more divided as special interest groups seek their own advantage. It's becoming coarser as people flame others at the slightest pretext. It's becoming narcissistic as people choose their own interests and ignore the common good. It's becoming networked through technology and yet people are lonelier than ever. Our culture experiences more speed, more wealth, more opportunity and more freedom, yet more moral decadence, personal hopelessness, social division and injustice. These are the very opposite of *shalom*. If Converge can offer — through word and deed — a deeply biblical, deeply sane, deeply sacrificial, deeply winsome alternative, just imagine how that might help us fulfill the mission of starting and strengthening churches?

Seventh, ***choose to act***. Actions speak louder than words. If Converge people and churches reach across boundaries of diversity in counter-cultural ways, they show that the message of God's love and forgiveness is more than verbiage. What exactly should each person, each church, each district do? That goes beyond what this position paper has addressed. But action— real, sacrificial, counter-cultural, difference-making action—this is what's needed. It's needed in each of the diversity categories of race, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, class and

geographical identity. And given the history of North America, it's 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 characterize the times we live in. We, the people of Converge, are choosing to embrace biblical diversity as part of doing God's will and building God's Kingdom. In so doing, we are saying, "We don't want to be like the world. We don't want to be the servants of political parties or secular ideologies, whether on the left or the right. We don't want to fall victim to messages from Washington or Wall Street or Madison Avenue or Hollywood. We want to be different. We intend to be a 'chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession.' We aspire to be a uniquely healthy and holy people in a rotten world so that we might 'declare the praise of him who called [us] out of darkness into his wonderful light' (1 Pet. 2:9). We want to be a unique people who declare God's praise in worship, in witness and in compassion."

A deep, principled, unshakeable commitment to God's mission to reach "every tribe and tongue," and Spirit-led, Bible-informed efforts to truly live life as the "New Humanity," will make a huge difference in our world. God will transform us and as a result he will involve us in the transformation of the individual persons we love, the communities we live in, the nation we call home and the world Christ died to save. A united movement focused on the gospel with hopeful action toward *shalom*, even if slow and halting at times, will help bring God's Kingdom to its fulfillment. By God's grace, we choose this path.