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CONVERGE

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Ca a G a u l B b a P u u

AT a P Pa , C B b a D M

“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

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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).

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Da C a l a A a

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.

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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, !"#%&(is present. But !"#%&(is the very opposite of the conflict between groups that political correctness fosters. A biblical approach to commonly identified diversity

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and every community stands under the sovereign Lordship of Christ. By seeking the !"#%&(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.

T C S

Rebellion against God disrupted the !"#%&(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).

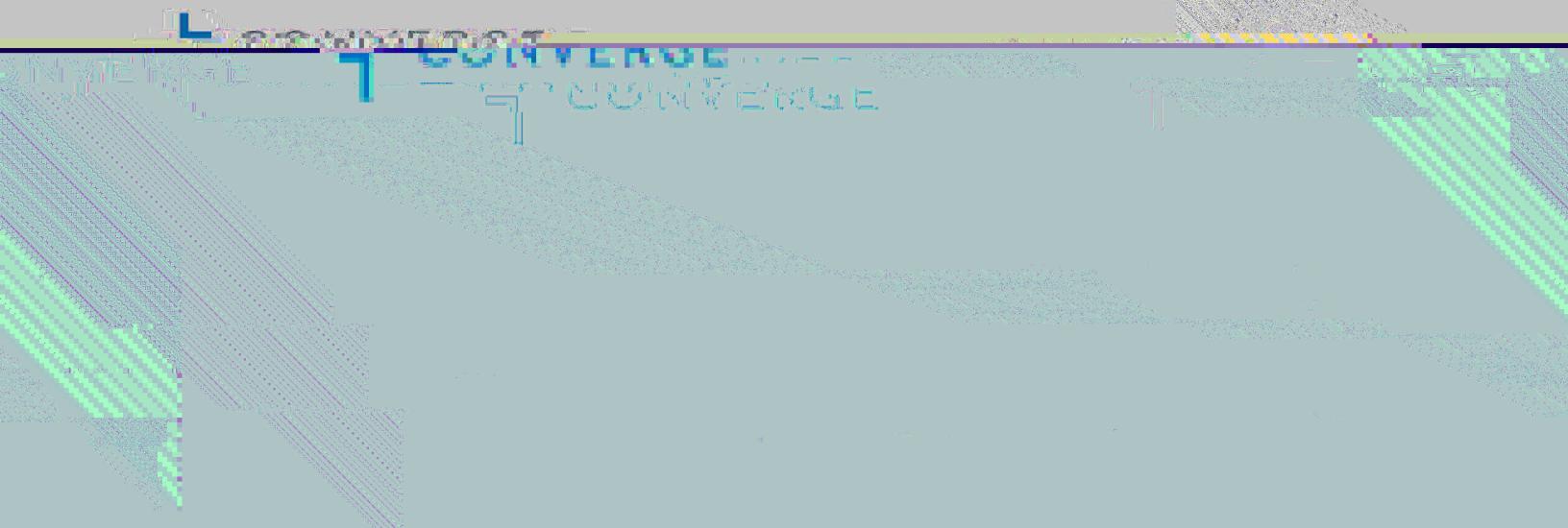
But the implications of the curse of sin go much further. Not only did Adam and Eve become individually separated from God and experience hardship in their lives, but soon sin touched Cain and Abel as one brother murdered another.

Eventually, every part of the created world became cursed as the ihcrLen5/mgrrscoa-mchNm-a---mhnTmhnTm5/mgrrscoa-n

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conflict. These conditions condemn some groups to a marginal existence at best, while other groups enjoy long

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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.

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I a E a M

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

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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

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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. T

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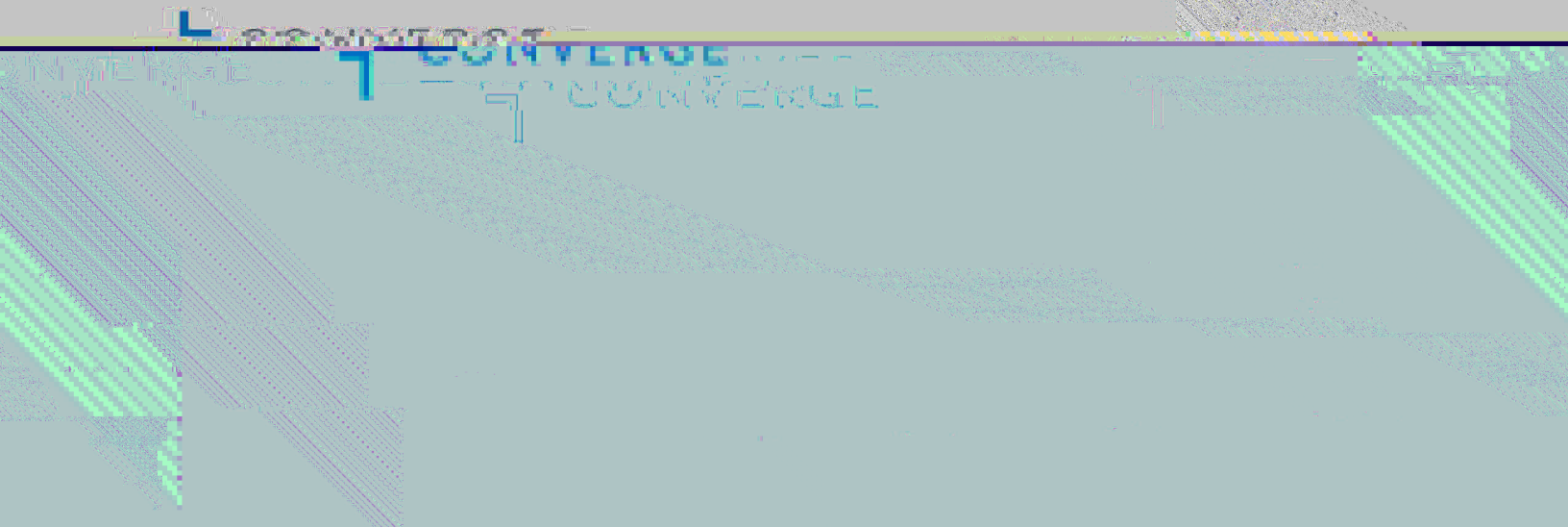
God built “unity in diversity” into the creation. This is pictured quintessentially in Christian marriage, a loving unity of gender opposites. The Evil One, who pits people against each

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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, **e abli h ne rela ion hip** . 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 t

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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 !"#%&