



One New Humanity: A Christian Theological Perspective on Diversity

Lancaster Bible College|Capital Seminary and Graduate School, in keeping with our mission, vision, and statement of faith, seek to live consistently as followers of Christ. This includes our commitment to live out Christ's call for his diverse people to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:1-3).

We recognize that we live in a society marked by contentious divisions along the lines of race, ethnicity, culture, language, national origin, sex, and ability. Many grievances are rooted in a history of unjust treatment, particularly (but not exclusively) with respect to the concept of race.

Despite these sinful manifestations of pride and selfishness, our differences are not inherently bad. God created humans as diverse, and differences of sex, ethnicity, language, and nationality will be preserved in the redeemed humanity (Rev 7:9-10). From eternity past, God purposed to unite all things in Christ (Eph 1:3-10), and with that *telos* in view, he is building a church of diverse people unified in Christ (Eph 2:11-22). Christ calls his body to welcome and include a diversity of people sanctified by the Holy Spirit and marked by love for one another (Eph 4:1-16).

As members of the redeemed humanity in Christ, we seek to live in faithful anticipation of this future as a diverse community unified by love. We walk a road that runs from God's creational intentions for humanity, over the hill of Calvary's redemption, to the eschatological realization of those purposes. We recognize this road is narrow and difficult and diverges from the broad road many in our society are following (Matt 7:13-14). Walking it requires humility, perseverance, and submission to Christ. As we walk, we seek to avoid straying to either side. On one side lie the dangers of minimizing sin; dismissing generations of pain and grievance; ignoring unjust systems, practices, and patterns of behavior; and benign inaction. On the other lie the dangers of embracing a sub-Christian understanding of love that fails to take seriously the biblical need to make moral judgments and distinctions; simplistic attributions of good or evil to anyone based on identity; and the pursuit of diversity independently of a redeemed unity in the new humanity in Christ (Eph 2:11-22).

We have not always been faithful in walking this road. Both as an institution and as individuals our policies and our behavior have not always been just, and have sometimes failed to grant due respect, honor, and dignity to other humans who bear God's image, following fallen attitudes of partiality and division rather than Christ's call to love one another (James 2:8-9). We confess such failures as sin. Therefore we assume an attitude of repentance as we desire first to understand from the Scriptures what Christ requires of us in the area of our attitudes and actions toward others, both in the church and in the world, and then through faith and submission to his Lordship to live accordingly.

As members of Christ's reconciled body we not only seek to live out reconciliation with one another, but we also recognize our calling to be ambassadors of reconciliation as we bear

witness to the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and implore all to be reconciled to God through him (2 Cor 5:11-21). This witness begins with the love we demonstrate for one another in Christ (John 13:34-35), and it is seen in our loving witness to all people as we proclaim the gospel and as we promote *shalom* in the world by doing good to all people (Gal 6:9-10).

One New Humanity: An Exposition of the Biblical and Theological Basis for LBC's Perspective on Diversity

Introduction

The fact of human diversity is apparent to all, but its meaning is contested in our day. Lancaster Bible College|Capital Seminary and Graduate School, as a community of believers in Christ who submit to the authority of God's Word, desire to base our understanding of diversity firmly on the truth of God's revelation, and to live in accordance with that truth. This exposition articulates the biblical and theological basis for our statement, "One New Humanity."

Because the meaning of diversity is contested, it is important to explain what we mean by the term, in line with our biblical and theological convictions, and to distinguish our understanding from other ideas current in the cultural conversation about diversity. Evangelicals have typically not done this well, and have tended to respond to grievances about prejudice and exclusion either with a reactionary negation or an uncritical embrace of humanistic proposals for redress. We seek to avoid both errors, and instead to develop an analysis of diversity and its meaning deeply rooted in a Christian understanding of God's purposes for humanity. We recognize that our position will be counter-cultural, and that our conclusions will confound those who reason according to human traditions and the basic principles of this world, and not according to Christ (Col 2:8).

Diversity refers to differences, particularly differences that relate to one's identity. Some of these differences are natural to humanity, while others are rooted in human decisions. Natural differences include biological sex, genetic traits, and those related to heritage, such as ethnicity, language, and nationality. In the context of a fallen world, natural differences also include differences of ability stemming from genetic inheritance, injury, or illness. Differences rooted in human decisions are many, including such things as culture, religious belief, socio-economic status, expressions of sexual orientation, lifestyles, interests, etc. In saying that these differences are rooted in human decision, we do not mean that in every case these differences are solely the result of individual decisions. In many cases these decisions result in corporate patterns of behavior and affect people who had no part in making the pertinent decisions, sometimes across generations. We also recognize a complex interplay between nature and nurture that precludes the ability to clearly assign responsibility for any particular case of these differences.

The Bible makes it clear that differences rooted in human decisions are subject to God's judgment, since humans often seek to define an identity apart from or in defiance of God's purposes (e.g., Gen 11:1-9). Because of this, Christians are responsible to make moral distinctions. We are not simply to accept every difference without discernment, but to pursue lives of holiness and virtue (Lev 19:2; Eph 5:1-12; Phil 1:9-11; 1 Thess 5:21-22). We are also called to condemn holding any natural difference as being more significant than our common

human status as bearers of God's image or than the redeemed identity all believers share in Christ (1 Cor 3:1-3; Gal 5:19-21; Jas 3:13-18).

We do not see in Scripture an unqualified pursuit of diversity as a goal; rather we see that God's purpose for humanity is to manifest a unity of diverse people redeemed in Christ. God will preserve differences in the eternal state, but he will redeem those differences by the power of Christ's atoning blood and the sanctifying cleansing of the Holy Spirit. Until then, we recognize that our sinfulness precludes our ability to eradicate the problems of partiality and prejudice through human means. While we faithfully seek to implement better policies and practices, we recognize our deep need of God's grace to bring transformation in history and realize that our achievements will at best be proximate and partial until Christ brings full redemption at his return.

At the same time, as God's people in the church, we are called to manifest the unity of the Spirit, and so we have divine resources to draw on in this task. Our unity begins as we are incorporated into Christ's body through repentance and faith and receive the indwelling Holy Spirit (Eph 2:1-10; 1:13-14; Gal 5:16-24). Christ calls us to submit ourselves to himself as those who were created by him and for him (Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:16); to repent of sinful attitudes and actions that elevate any difference above our common identity in Christ (Jas 2:8-9; Gal 3:26-28); to seek reconciliation with those against whom we have sinned through prejudice and partiality (Matt 5:23-24; 2 Cor 5:16-21); and to invite, to welcome, and to include all who believe in Christ into the family of God (Matt 28:19-20; Rom 8:14-17; Heb 3:6).

God's Design for Humanity

God reveals himself in Scripture to be one God in three Persons, the eternal and transcendent source of all things. In him we see the perfect example of diversity in unity. The three eternal Persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are each distinct, yet share the one divine nature, expressing their oneness in a relational unity of mutual love. In God we see that diversity is not antithetical to unity. In fact, the Trinity is only understood correctly when we recognize that the three Persons are not identical. Unity assumes diversity. Without diversity, unity collapses into identity.

God created all humans to bear his image (Gen 1:26-28). An aspect of that image is the diversity of humanity: the first humans were created "male and female" (Gen 1:26-28). This God-ordained diversity was part of God's "very good" creation (Gen 1:31), and allowed humans the ability to "be fruitful and multiply" in fulfillment of God's creation mandate to humans. This original diversity indicates that God's intention for humanity was to manifest diversity in unity as part of our nature—reflecting a unity analogous to that of the Trinity: a unity of distinct persons in a relationship of mutual love. This original unity is seen in the one flesh union of the first couple (Gen 2:24-25), in the *shalom* of the first Sabbath (Gen 2:1-4), in the unity of the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-27), and finds its full realization in the union of Christ and the church (Eph 5:22-33; Rev 19:6-9).

In the course of time, humanity began to reflect other differences—linguistic, ethnic, cultural, etc. These differences were not all good, as the judgment at Babel (Gen 11:1-9) and the prophets' condemnations of idolatrous worship make clear. Following Adam and Eve, humans

rejected their identity as creatures (Gen 3:4-5), suppressing the truth of their status as people created by God for his purposes, and sought their identity in other things (Jer 2:5; Rom 1:21-23). Differences came to be a source of division and conflict, destroying the *shalom* of the pre-fall world, fracturing human community, and leading to hatred, injustice, exploitation, and oppression. Such sins disrespect the image of God, and therefore are offenses against God himself (Gen 9:6; James 3:7-10).

Nevertheless, God declared his purpose to redeem his fallen creatures, covenanting with Abraham to bring blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen 12:1-3), explicitly including people of all nations (Ps 67; Is 25:6-9; Mark 11:17). Into this fallen world God came in the incarnation of the Son as Redeemer (John 1:1-18; Gal 4:4-6). Redemption was accomplished by the blood of Christ himself in atonement for human sin (Rom 3:21-26; Col 1:15-20), a redemption that reconciles those who were at enmity with God and with each other (Rom 5:6-8; 2 Cor 5:16-21; Col 1:21-23; Eph 2:14). Christ redeems individuals from their fallenness and incorporates them into a redeemed community, one in which the walls of separation are broken down, and all are brought near as one new humanity (Eph 2:11-22). According to God's redemptive plan and purpose, his redeemed people are all adopted into the one household of God (Rom 8:14-17) and truly united in Christ: a diverse group eternally retaining markers of ethnicity, language, and kinship, who live out perfectly a loving unity of worship and praise to God (Rev 7:9-10; 21:9-27).

Understanding Our Obligations in the Fallen World

Until the eschatological realization of Christ's kingdom, the legacy of Adam's sin will continue to affect all his descendants, and the effects of sin in both individuals and society persist from generation to generation. Humans have an unbroken history of divisions based on such differences as ethnicity, culture, wealth, social status, nationality, biological sex, ability, and religious tradition. Groups with power have often used their power to exploit and oppress groups with less power. These features of human society are so common that they seem to be natural, but the biblical witness makes it clear that God did not intend for humans to divide into factions based on differences (Acts 6:1-7; 1 Cor 3:1-9; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11), nor for any group of humans, no matter how defined, to treat other groups unjustly (Lev 19:9-18; Matt 5:43-48; Gal 6:10).

As we await the consummation of all things, the consistency of the biblical narrative in portraying God's purposes for humanity from creation to New Creation grounds our understanding of diversity. We see diversity as an important aspect of human existence, though it exists within an essential unity. God created humans as a single race (Gen 5:1-2; Acts 17:26), each one individually and all corporately bearing his image (Gen 1:26-28). But that image is refracted through many differences, including aspects of our identities that are based in gender, ethnicity, language, culture, ability, nationality, and interests. In this fallen world, these differences lead to sinful attitudes and behaviors contrary to God's purposes, and they must be redeemed by Christ for true justice to be realized. As redeemed disciples, we are called to submit our differences to Christ and in Christ to submit to one another (Eph 5:21). Our goal, then, is not diversity alone, but a unity of fellowship and love in Christ that welcomes and embraces all people (1 John 3:11-24).

Our Obligation to All People

God's purpose in building the church is to purify for himself a holy people, conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; Titus 2:11-14; 1 Pet 2:4-10). As such, the church and its members are to reflect the purposes and priorities of Christ, our Head (Eph 1:19-33). As God's people, we are called to love God, which includes loving our neighbors as ourselves (Matt 22:37-40). This defines our obligation to all people, believers or unbelievers. Love of neighbor includes showing mercy and doing good to those in need (Luke 10:25-37), even to the point of loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us (Matt 5:43-48). We are to do good to all, to refrain from returning evil for evil, to do what is honorable in the sight of all, and to overcome evil with good (Rom 12:14-21). Therefore, any attitudes or behaviors which intentionally deny the dignity of any human person or any group of people, which demean or degrade them, which treat them unjustly, or which fail to seek their good, are sin, and all who call on the name of Christ must reject them.

Beyond this, we also recognize our calling to be ambassadors of reconciliation, bearing witness to the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and imploring all to be reconciled to God through him (2 Cor 5:11-21). We have been commissioned by Christ to make disciples of all nations, and so we proclaim the gospel to all people and seek to see everyone—people of all ethnicities, cultures, classes, and conditions—find everlasting life through faith in Christ (Matt 28:19-20; John 3:16). In keeping with our call to be stewards of creation in the cultural mandate (Gen 1:28), we also seek to witness and to work redemptively in opposition to injustice in society in ways appropriate to our calling as disciples of Christ, promoting *shalom* as far as we are able (Matt 5:14-16; Rom 12:18; Gal 6:9-10; 1 Tim 2:1-4).

Our Obligation to Other Christians

Christ has given us a new commandment to love one another as he has loved us (John 13:34-35). Within the body of Christ, we are called to live in the unity of the Spirit, maintaining the bond of peace (Eph 4:1-3). This delineates our obligation to other believers. While failing to respect the dignity of any image bearer is sin, it is a sin that is compounded within the body of Christ, since divisions within the church are incompatible with the peace and unity Christ bought with his own blood (Eph 2:13; Acts 15; 1 Cor 3:1-9). True unity of the Spirit depends on a common loyalty to Christ, to the Word of God, to sound doctrine, and a common worship of the one Triune God (Eph 4:1-6). But unity does not demand uniformity in other areas. The unity of the Body of Christ should reflect a loving embrace of all disciples of Christ, recognizing their freedom to participate fully as members of the family of God regardless of ethnicity, culture, language, national origin, ability, etc. (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11).

Where we have failed to do this in the past, and in occasions when we fail to do this in the future, we recognize that the proper biblical response is repentance and forgiveness (2 Cor 7:10; Col 3:12-15; Jas 5:16; 1 John 1:5-10). Further, it is appropriate for God's people to lament the injustice and hatred that we see in our world and in the church (Prov 29:27; Eccl 4:1-3; 1 Cor 13:6). In keeping with true repentance, we humbly and prayerfully seek to pursue love (1 Cor 13:1-14:1); to encourage one another to live in peace and unity (Rom 15:1-5); to bear with each other and forgive one another, to love, teach, and admonish one another (Col 3:12-17); and to build one another up in order to grow together into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:11-16).

For the grace and humility and love we need to do all these things, we earnestly implore the Lord, that his will would be done in our community.

Contributors:

Dr. Dan Carver, Bible & Theology Professor

Dr. Mark Draper, Electronic Resources Librarian

Dr. Victor Jacobs, Bible & Theology Professor

Dr. Joe Kim, Bible & Theology Professor

Dr. Dan Spanjer, Arts & Sciences Dept. Chair