



Christian Unity in Ethnic Diversity

*A Position Paper by the Elders of
Cherrydale Baptist Church*

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Written by the Elders of Cherrydale Baptist Church

The subjects of race,¹ racism, and justice have been heavily discussed and debated topics since the founding of our country. Over the past several years, these issues have moved once again to the forefront of the national conversation. Conflicts over the nature of and potential solutions to America's problems with race have reached a fever pitch in the public square. As a local church, we want to approach these conversations with discernment, love, and confidence in the sufficiency of Christ and His holy Word. As an Elder Council, we have been seeking Christ's leadership of our flock with respect to these pressing issues over the past several years, but recent events have underscored the importance and urgency of addressing them more specifically and openly in a way that reflects God's heart as revealed in the Bible.

This paper explains some of the important truths we have learned from God's Word and describes the vision He has given us as leaders of Cherrydale Baptist Church with respect to race, racism, and justice.

1. God planned before the foundation of time to display His glory through a diverse people unified by His redeeming grace, and He unfolds this plan beautifully in His Word.
2. We recognize that since Jesus' death and resurrection, some Christians have struggled—at times in profound and painful ways—to embrace this wonderful, diverse vision. Others have captured this biblical vision and committed themselves to its fulfillment.
3. We desire our church family, in all its diversity, to be united in joyful, authentic worship of our glorious king Jesus and a steadfast commitment to make disciples of all nations.

We want to begin our discussion with a review of what the Bible says about race and justice in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As we turn to Scripture, our final authority, we must also humbly acknowledge the ways that Christians in the past have badly misinterpreted and mishandled God's Word to justify the sins of slavery and racism. We are humbly, sincerely, and prayerfully seeking God's heart on these matters of race and justice, which requires the guidance of His Spirit. But we also need one another. We who are members of the same church family bring different cultural lenses to our study of the Bible. Understanding these differences will help us see where our own cultural perspective might be helping or hindering our interpretation of Scripture. As we approach these serious, critical, and urgent issues together—in love as brothers and sisters in Christ—we must ask God's Spirit to give each of us a posture of humility, softheartedness, and openness to correction that comes from His Word.

¹ While the term *race* is vague and ill-defined, we use it in this paper because of its continued prominence in American parlance. Race, at least as we use the concept in the United States, is a social construct, which means that it is not an actual, objective, biological category, but one that people created. As early as the 16th and 17th centuries, people were using this category to justify subjugating and enslaving others. By the late 18th century, the Göttingen School of History had developed the modern categorization of human race according to skin color. Our preferred term is ethnicity (from the Greek word *ethnē* for "people" or "people group"), which is what the Bible uses, along with nationality and language, to distinguish between different types of people. (See Rev. 7:9.)

1. The story line of the Bible reveals God's plan to display His glory through a diverse people unified by His redeeming grace.

God created one race, the human race, to be His unique image bearers on earth.

The Bible opens with a dramatic description of the one, true God, forming and fashioning the world through the creative power of His Spirit and His Word (Gen 1:1–3)—the Word He would reveal in time to be His Son (John 1:1–3; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2). Cherrydale's Statement of Faith describes God's perfect unity and equality in diversity:

We believe there is one, and only one, living and true God, an infinite, intelligent Spirit, the Maker and Supreme Ruler of heaven and earth;... that in the unity of the Godhead there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, equal in every divine perfection, and executing distinct but harmonious offices in the great work of redemption.

The capstone of God's creation was the human race, which He created male and female in His image (Gen 1:27), echoing the equality (Gen 1:26–31), unity (Gen 2:19–20), and diversity (Gen 2:20–23) of the Godhead. Human diversity reflects the distinctions in the persons of the Trinity. God created humans to be in relationship with Him and to experience the love that the persons of the Godhead already enjoyed with one another. Because every person bears the image of God, every person has intrinsic value that is worthy of dignity and respect. Human life is sacred.

Mankind's rebellion resulted in God's judgment and the proliferation of sin.

When the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, rebelled against God and His Word, they experienced immediate alienation from God (Gen 3:8–10) and from one another (3:7, 11–16)—alienation that led one of their sons to kill the other (Gen 4:8, 23–24). In the generations to come, human beings would become rampantly wicked, which would bring God's judgment in the form of a flood (Gen 6–7). Following the flood, Noah's descendants failed to love and glorify God, and they rejected His command to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen 9:1; cf. Gen 1:26–27). Instead they chose to come together to build the tower of Babel for their own glory instead of God's (Gen 11:4). Their rebellion brought further judgment when God dispersed humanity and confused their language so that they could not communicate with one another and cooperate in their collective idolatry (Gen 11:7–9).

God set Israel apart to worship Him alone and reflect His holy character—including love and justice—to all peoples.

Against this backdrop of human sin and divine judgment, God initiated His plan to redeem His image bearers and bless all the families and nations of the earth: He called one man, Abraham, to become the father of His chosen people, the nation of Israel (Gen 12:1–3). Early

in their history, Israel would experience the pain of injustice; they would bear the heavy burden of oppression that results from a sinful emphasis on national distinctions when neighboring Egypt enslaved them and murdered their children (Exod 1:8–22). God miraculously freed His people, Israel, from the evil of chattel slavery (Exod 6–14). He established a covenant with them and gave them laws that reflected His holy character (Exod 20:1–21)—laws that, when obeyed, were intended to set Israel apart for the purpose of drawing and reconciling the surrounding nations unto Himself (Deut 4:4–7).

God is righteous, holy, and just (Gen 18:5; Deut 32:4; Job 40:2, 8; Pss 19:8; 89:4; 99:9; Isa 30:18; 45:19; Rom 3:25–26). This means not only that God always does what is good and right but also that He Himself is the final standard of what is good and right. The word for “justice” in the Old Testament (*mishpat* in Hebrew), carries the basic meaning of treating people equitably, regardless of race or social status, and God was consistent in His execution of justice for widows, orphans, strangers, and the poor (Exod 22:22–24; Lev 19:34; 25:35; Deut 10:18; 14:28–29; 15:7–11; 24:17–18; 26:12; 27:19; Ps 146:7–9; Prov 15:25; 23:10–11). So, biblical justice included providing protection and care for the most vulnerable and marginalized members of society.²

Although God’s laws (Lev 19:15; Deut 16:20) and His psalms (Pss 34:17–18; 37:27–29; 99:4; 103:6; 140:12) were unequivocally clear about the importance of justice, His people failed to obey Him. Even when He sent His prophets to call Israel repeatedly and graciously to repentance on a host of moral and spiritual issues—including injustice (Isa 1:17; 56:1; 61:8–9; Jer 9:23–24; 22:3; Hos 12:6; Amos 5:24; Mic 6:8; Zech 7:9; Mal 3:5)—they persisted in their wickedness and sin. Thankfully, Israel’s prophets also foretold God’s plan to send His Messiah to redeem a remnant from their people and from the very nations who opposed and oppressed them (Isa 2:2–4; 19:25; 40:5; 42:1, 4; 49:6; 52:13, 15; 56:6–7a; Jer 12:15–16; 48:47; Zeph 2:11b; 3:9–10). God also promised His indwelling Spirit who would revive His people and supernaturally empower them to obey His Word (Ezek 36:26–28; 37:14).

Israel rejected their role as worshipers of God and reflectors of His love and justice.

Israel’s primary and ultimate problem was a failure to worship God alone as they turned instead to rampant idolatry and worship of foreign gods (Exod 32:1–10; Num 25:1–9; 1 Kgs 15:12; 16:13, 26; 21:26; 2 Kgs 17:12, 15; 21:11, 21; 23:24; Pss 78:58; 106:36–39; Isa 2:8; Jer 8:19; Ezek 6:4–13; 20:4–49; Hos 13:1–2; et al.). They rebelled against His holy law. Even though God had set Israel apart to be a light to the nations (Isa 42:6; 49:6; 52:10; 60:3), they rejected their role as reflectors of His holy character (Ezek 36:22–23) as they failed to love God with all their heart, soul, and mind (Deut 6:5), and they failed to love their neighbors as themselves (Lev 19:18).

Ironically, God used foreign nations like Assyria and Babylon to discipline His people for their idolatry (Isa 10:5; Jer 25:8–11; Hos 5:1–7) before eventually restoring them to their land (Isa 44:28). Following their return from exile, Israel’s leaders overemphasized God’s gracious election while overlooking His call to be a light and a blessing to the nations. As a

² Keller, Timothy. *Generous Justice: How God’s Grace Makes Us Just* (New York: Dutton, 2010), pp. 3–4.

result, Israel developed ethnic and religious pride and hatred, despising Gentiles (i.e., non-Jews) and forming traditions that kept them completely separated from familiar contact or communication with those outside of Israel (John 4:9; 8:48; Acts 10:28; 22:21–22).

Jesus is the true, faithful Israel who accomplished what the nation had failed to do.

As Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah, began His earthly ministry, He confronted the sinful superiority of His fellow Jews by reminding them of God’s mercy to Gentiles in the past. They responded with furious, murderous anger (Luke 4:16–30). Although the focus of Jesus’ ministry to Israel is clear throughout the gospels (Matt 10:56; 15:24), He also identified Himself as the Servant promised in Isaiah 42, who would “proclaim righteousness to the Gentiles” (Matt 12:18–21, quoting Isa 42:1–3). He ministered to Gentiles in powerful and profound ways (Matt 15:21–28; Mark 7:31–8:10; John 4:1–42), and He even declared the faith of a Roman oppressor to be greater than any in Israel (Matt 8:5–13). As the true, faithful Israel, Jesus accomplished what the nation had failed to do: release the blessing of salvation so it might flow freely from Abraham’s descendants to all the nations of the earth, just as God had promised throughout the Old Testament.

As “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15), Jesus is the perfect representation of God’s holy character, including His steadfast obedience to the Father, His generous and gracious heart for all peoples, and His commitment to draw God’s chosen ones—including Gentiles—unto Himself and to hold them fast until the end (John 17:1–26). Jesus’ obedience led Him to the cross, where He, the sinless one, died a sinner’s death so that all who trust in Him might be saved from their sin and the just punishment it demands (Isa 53:4–5; John 5:24; Rom 3:23–24; 1 Cor 15:3–4; Gal 3:13–14; Eph 2:1–10; Phil 2:6–8; 1 Pet 2:24–25; 3:18). And on the third day after His crucifixion, Jesus rose from the dead in a powerful declaration of God’s victory over sin and death (1 Cor 15:20–28, 54–57; 2 Cor 4:14; Eph 1:20–23; 1 Thess 1:10; 1 Pet 1:21; 3:21–22; Rev 20:6, 14–15).

Jesus commissioned and empowered His church to make disciples of all nations as a reflection of God’s heart for all peoples.

After Jesus’ death and resurrection, which accomplished salvation for all who would believe in Him, He commissioned His disciples to go to the ends of the earth to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18–20; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). And His disciples would teach others to obey His commands, which prioritized love for God (Matt 6:24; 22:37–38; Mark 12:29–30; Luke 10:27–28; 16:13; John 8:42; 17:25–26), love for neighbor (Matt 5:43 19:19; 22:39–40; Mark 12:31–34; Luke 10:25–37), righteousness (Matt 5:6, 14–16; 6:33; 25:31–40), and justice (Matt 23:23; Luke 11:42–44; 18:7–8).

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He instructed His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4–5). In Acts 2:5–11, we find a “table of nations,” a list of the various nationalities of those who had gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish Feast of Pentecost. The only other place in the Bible that we find a similar list is in Genesis 10, the passage that precedes the tragedy of Babel. There were many nations speaking one language, working together to reach the heavens in their own strength and for their own

glory. In Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus' disciples just as He had promised (John 14:15-17; 15:26-27; 16:4b-15), these Jewish men began to speak in the many different languages of those gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost. God performed a miracle to reverse the judgment of Babel. At Babel, God came down in judgment, dispersing the nations and confusing the languages (Gen 11:5ff). At Pentecost, He came down in blessing by way of His Spirit, empowering the disciples to preach the good news of Jesus so that those from many nations who heard might receive the blessing of salvation. Just as God had promised through the prophet Ezekiel, the Holy Spirit would now indwell Christ's followers, giving them new life, convicting them of sin, reproducing His character so that they might love God and neighbor (John 3:3-8; 16:8-11; Gal 5:22-24), and empowering them to work in miraculous ways that bore witness to God's redemption extended to the nations (Acts 3:9; 5:12-16; 6:8; 8:26-40; 9:40-43). The apostle Peter then preached a sermon that ended with this encouragement: "For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself" (Acts 2:39). Yes, the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection is for all peoples!

God was relentless in reinforcing the all-peoples nature of Christ's gospel to the early church.

Despite God's miraculous display at Pentecost, it becomes clear as the book of Acts unfolds that the very first Christians—including Jesus' closest disciples—struggled to grasp fully the all-peoples nature of the gospel message He had entrusted to them. Even Peter, the apostle who had preached those very words in Acts 2, was slow to accept God's gracious inclusion of the Gentiles. In Acts 10-11, God sends Peter multiple miraculous signs that motivate him to visit a Gentile centurion named Cornelius. Peter eventually agrees to visit Cornelius where he acknowledges the Jews' man-made traditions regarding Gentiles: "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation" (Acts 10:28a). These extrabiblical rules, which reinforced sinful ethnic and religious pride, actually violated God's law and prevented him—even as a Spirit-filled Christian—to see God's heart until He revealed it to Peter once again: "But God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.... Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:28b, 34-35).

God was relentless in helping Peter understand that the gospel is for all peoples—a central message of the whole Bible that becomes unmistakably clear in the book of Acts. We see Jewish Christians under the power of the Holy Spirit accepting Jesus' call to become His witnesses (Acts 1:8) to Samaritans and Africans (Acts 8), to Romans (Acts 10) and Greeks (Acts 11). After Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus, the Lord revealed his intentions for him to a Christian named Ananias: "He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel." Later in Acts, Saul (also called Paul) delivered a sermon in Athens, declaring these words to his Greek audience: "And [God] made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him" (Acts 17:26-27b). God, in His providence, uses people's nationality and location to draw them unto Himself. He is a God for all peoples!

Peter would struggle with the all-peoples nature of the gospel yet again, revealing just how deeply ingrained these cultural associations are. In Galatians 2, we learn that Peter had fallen back into a refusal to fellowship with Gentile believers, even though he had received direct revelation from God about their inclusion in His redemptive plan (Acts 10–11) and had previously shared meals at the Gentiles’ table (Gal 2:11–12). Paul rebuked Peter publicly with these words:

When I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to [Peter] before them all, ‘If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?’ We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ (Gal 2:14–16a).

Paul reminded his fellow apostle that his relationship with God was based on His grace and not his own ethnicity, culture, or devotion to specific religious practices. In so doing, Paul emphasized the spiritual roots of racism and prejudice: Jesus’ gospel leaves no room for prioritizing cultural or ethnic distinctions over God’s blood-bought, Spirit-wrought grace. Elevating one culture over another is an attempt at self-justification, which reveals a heart opposed to God’s gift of salvation through the gospel of His Son—a gospel that is for all peoples and all cultures. Christians who demonstrate prejudice are not in alignment with this gracious, merciful gospel and, like the apostle Peter, need to repent.

Christian community rooted in God’s Word and the gospel humbles us and helps us confront sins that we cannot see on our own, including racism and prejudice.

Paul’s address of Peter’s sin in Galatians 2 is noteworthy because he neither elevated himself nor demeaned his brother. Instead, he helped Peter to see the riches of God’s unmerited favor. Later in that same letter to the Galatians, Paul writes, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). For Christians, our identity in Christ supersedes every other aspect of our identity. We have deeper bonds with fellow followers of Jesus who have different skin colors and cultural backgrounds than we do with members of our own family who have not yet put their trust in Christ! If Peter, a Spirit-filled man and one of Jesus’ closest disciples, wrestled repeatedly with the concept of this truth, we should recognize our own potential for struggle and blindness too; this is a pervasive and insidious spiritual challenge. We find profound help from the instructions that Paul gave to the Ephesian church:

Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and...be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and...put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another (Eph 4:23–25).

A crucial aspect of our life together as a local church is the commitment that we make to confront sins—including prejudice, racism, and hatred of every kind—by speaking the truth

in love so that we might grow up in every way into Christ our head (Eph 4:15–16). We need each other to see our own blind spots. We must invite and welcome correction in accordance with God’s Word. And we **need** humility to receive biblical correction when someone offers it in love.

Through the cross of Christ, God has reconciled all peoples—Jew and Gentile alike—into one new humanity.

We find one of the clearest explanations of the gospel and our reconciliation to God in the second chapter of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, verses 1–10. In the passage that immediately follows, Paul describes the reconciliation of his Gentile audience and the Jews into one new humanity: “But now in Christ Jesus you [Gentiles] who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13). God has reconciled Jews and Gentiles alike to Himself through the cross, and in so doing, He has broken down the dividing wall of hostility that separated them prior to Jesus’ death and resurrection. Not only has He removed the spiritual significance of the distinction between Jew and Gentile, but He has reconciled them into one body, the body of Christ, the church (1 Cor 12:12–13; Eph 4:4). And if God can reconcile Jews and Gentiles, two groups of people previously separated spiritually by His own covenant and its signs (Eph 2:12, 15), He can reconcile anyone. And He does so by the new covenant in Christ’s blood (Matt 26:28; 1 Cor 11:25; Heb 13:20).

God is gathering a redeemed people from every nation, tribe, and tongue who will worship Him forever.

As we have seen, the Bible emphasizes the fundamental unity of the human race (Acts 17:26), the equality of all people as God’s image bearers (Gen 1:26–27), and the spiritual unity of Christ’s church, regardless of ethnic or cultural distinctions (Gal 3:28; Eph 2:13). The final book of the Bible, Revelation, reveals that in the new heaven and new earth, the people of God will be “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Rev 7:9). It would seem from this vision that God shared with the apostle John that our resurrection bodies will maintain their ethnicities. Glorification, God’s final redemption, will not erase the ethnic, cultural, or linguistic differences of our pre-resurrection existence, and yet we will all sing one unified refrain: “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Rev 7:10). Just as God is diverse, equal, and one, the Bride of Christ will be diverse, equal and one. If these qualities describe the future of the church, we believe that we should strive for them, by the power the Holy Spirit supplies, here and now for as long as Jesus tarries.

2. Throughout its history, the church’s record on the issues of race and justice has been mixed.

The scope of this paper does not allow us to address this point in the detail that it deserves, but it is critically important for us to acknowledge and lament the legacy of pain caused by Christians in areas related to race and justice. Even the use of race as a definer and divider is somewhat problematic because race, as we use the term today, is a social construct with

racist roots and no coherent, fixed definition. While we may consider and use race as a neutral term, the modern concept was developed to normalize and elevate one skin color as superior while simultaneously diminishing and demeaning others.

If we understand the deceitfulness of the human heart and sin's inherently selfish nature, we can recognize how distinctions like ethnicity, nationality, and culture can easily become sources of self-righteousness. When this happens, people can turn cultural preferences in the expression of their Christian faith (e.g., preaching style, musical style) into sinful badges of distinction. Prejudice based on the arbitrary modern category of race—what we call racism—is sinful. And racism not only opposes the Christian gospel, but it counters the vision God has revealed to us in His intention to redeem and unify His creation through Christ. In the Bible, there is one race—the human race—with Adam and Eve as our first parents (Gen 1–2; Mal 2:10; Luke 3:38; Acts 17:26; 1 Cor 15:22, 45) and one name under heaven by which we must be saved, the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12).

Sadly, the church has struggled to embrace this concept throughout its history, including the church in America. Christians owned slaves and actively opposed abolition. Christians advocated for, supported, and defended segregation and Jim Crow. Christians formed new congregations and denominations to segregate the church and deny the biblical truths of unity and reconciliation in Christ. When the demographics of an area changed, churches moved their buildings instead of reaching their immediate neighbors. Christians mistreated immigrants from all over the world. Christians resisted the Civil Rights movement. Even worse, Christians often used Scripture, albeit errant interpretations, to condone and promote these horrible and sinful injustices.

We are even aware of overt discrimination in Cherrydale's past.³ We grieve the failure of the American church and our own local church to address and confront the issues of racial injustice at various points of opportunity throughout history. Part of the reason that we are bearing this bitter fruit in our country today is because enough Christians did not speak out in the name of Jesus Christ against intolerance, racism, and hatred.

But we must also recognize that countless Christians, convinced by the Spirit from the Scriptures, have worked for justice, righteousness, and equitable treatment of all people. Christians fought to abolish slavery and emancipate slaves. Christians resisted segregation and Jim Crow. Christians were instrumental in the Civil Rights movement. Christians continue to work diligently and passionately to stop injustice—including slavery—that persists in our nation and around the world. We must continue this godly legacy of standing

³ In the 1950s, two African American students at Washington Bible College attended a Sunday service at Cherrydale Baptist as part of the school's encouragement to visit different local churches. After their experience, the two young women had planned to return to our church until the president of the college received a letter from someone associated with Cherrydale encouraging them not to come back. Providentially, God brought this instance to the attention of one of our elders, who was able to meet one of the two women and hear her story. (We have not been able to locate the other woman.) On behalf of Cherrydale, the elder was able to ask and receive forgiveness from this sister in Christ, who had carried around this deep wound for decades.

for truth in the name of Christ. As we recognize our own continued potential for error, we want to seek God's Word for how we might live in Christian unity as one diverse body in our day. We have a unique opportunity to apply God's Word faithfully to the pressing issues of race, racism, and justice. And we believe that the hope of Christ's gospel is the only true solution for the bitter disagreement and division that exists in our country and even in the American church.

3. We are committed to Christian unity in our ethnic diversity.

Just as God set Israel apart to be a blessing to the nations—to reflect His character and draw them to Himself—so has He set apart Christ's church. Unlike Israel, His church has now become a global body with the ability to demonstrate spiritual unity in its ethnic diversity. Christ is our head, and He bought this unity with His blood. We also have the benefit of the indwelling presence and power of His Spirit, who enables us to love God and neighbor.

As a local church, we are committed to exalting Christ, as we have been for over a century, and to aligning our church's fellowship with His gospel, which will necessarily entail confronting the sins of prejudice and racism while also promoting God's righteousness and justice. We recognize the ever-present temptation to drift from God's Word and to elevate and emphasize other aspects of our identity above our identity in Christ. To counter this drift in our own hearts and to experience the wonderful riches of life in His reconciled body, we need fresh reminders of God's truth and daily dependence on the Holy Spirit. As we await Christ's return, we are committed to lead Cherrydale Baptist Church in the following practices:

Look. We must look to Jesus Christ. He is the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb 12:2), He has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt 28:18; John 17:1–2; Eph 1:21; Col 2:10), and He therefore possesses the very wisdom that we need. In looking to Him, we consistently pray and ask Him to give us hearts that are aligned with his purposes. He is the one who can empower us by His Spirit to preserve our blood-bought unity and to celebrate our congregation's unique diversity. He alone can bring peace, healing, and reconciliation, even if it currently feels challenging and at times unattainable. As we look to Christ, we must pray for ourselves and for one another—that He will show each of us our own sins and our own spiritual blindness that have led us in the past to silent complicity or even active participation in racial injustice. Let us look to Jesus Christ.

Learn. We must commit to learn the truth about race, racism, and justice from the Scriptures. God's Word is our final authority. We must also learn from history, from people's personal experiences, and from other trustworthy resources. When we approach this subject with humility, learning will likely challenge our own cultural perspectives and help us to see the truth more clearly so that we might repent of indifference, willful sin, and silence in the face of injustice. We must work to listen to a diversity of perspectives from people who have thought carefully about the issues of race and justice, how they intersect with the gospel, and how this intersection applies to our unique circumstance today. We are committed to include a diversity of voices in our leadership of this church, and to seek diverse input into all aspects

of our fellowship. We all have room to grow. Let us learn together.

Love. Jesus taught us to love God and people above all else and Paul reminds us that without love we are nothing (Matt 22:37–40; 1 Cor 13:1–13). We fulfill Christ’s law and we love others well when we are sensitive to the unique burdens our brothers and sisters are carrying and we seek to bear those burdens for them (Gal 6:2); Jesus’ life on this earth was defined not only by the grief He experienced Himself, but also by the grief He carried for us (Isa 53:4). Love weeps with those who weep, cares for those who face injustice, and works diligently for justice and righteousness. Love laments over personal and national sin. Love repents and labors to reconcile. Love acknowledges the unity shared by all of God’s image bearers while preserving the unique spiritual unity shared by all of Christ’s followers. Love yields rights, gives grace, extends mercy, guards the tongue, and honors other consciences and cultural preferences. We must love God, one another, and our neighbors.

Lead. We recognize that this statement alone is insufficient. Each of us must step out and lead within the various spheres where God has given us influence by serving as active ambassadors for Christ and His reconciling gospel. Advocating for biblical justice—equitable punishment, protection, and care that aligns with God’s Word—is a vital and tangible way that we demonstrate our reconciliation with God. The specific way we do this is a matter of personal conscience (Rom 14:1–12), and we must be careful not to judge our brothers and sisters who might pursue different applications of justice or what justice might require, but we must not forsake its importance to our Christian faith. When we seek justice, we not only reflect God’s character, but we also adorn the gospel of Jesus Christ and commend it to those who have not yet embraced it.

As shepherds of this flock, we are committed to lead our ethnically diverse congregation to embrace the biblical unity Christ has accomplished. Our success in doing so will be in direct proportion to the degree in which we lead each other to the cross of Christ. We are a church family that is united supernaturally by the redemptive work of our God. We are bound together as a congregation by our common beliefs as outlined in our Statement of Faith and our common commitments as outlined in our Cherrydale Covenant. Christ Himself prayed and died for the unity of His future church (John 11:49–52; 17:20–23) with the understanding that our unity in Him would serve as an apologetic for His true identity. It is essential that we pray for and work toward this unity.

In a county like Arlington, we have a unique opportunity to pray that our church might reflect the wonderfully diverse community in which God has placed us. But a thriving multi-ethnic church is more than just a collection of people with differing skin colors, homelands, and native tongues. Rather than expecting that minority cultures will be subsumed into the majority culture, we long for our church to be a family of many different cultures whose members embrace our true spiritual unity in Christ, despite our differences, while identifying, confronting, and dismantling the longstanding barriers that have existed between us. We want our life together to serve as a genuine example of the unity for which Christ Himself prayed and died. Achieving this vision will require an authentic desire for and pursuit of the beauty, blessing, and benefit of a reconciled church; diverse and legitimate participation in vision, direction, and leadership; and the willingness of our members to

sacrifice personal preferences and traditions so that people from various backgrounds will feel welcomed and wanted in our church family.

These aspirational principles will require us to think more carefully about specific applications and actions in the months and years to come. As we face these challenges together, we must ask God to provide His supernatural power to fulfill this biblical vision He has given us. We must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Our prayer is that Cherrydale Baptist Church will glorify God, exalt His Son, walk in His Spirit, obey His Word, and serve as a welcome haven of His sovereign grace for all people.

We welcome your feedback and questions at elders@cherrydale.org.