

## **RADICAL IN OUR DIVERSITY PRT 2**

### A Biblical Perspective on Diversity

#### **1. Diversity is a God-created good**

#### **2. Diversity makes the gospel relevant to all humanity**

- Some Christians view cultural diversity as part of the fallen world, as a curse.
- This view is derived from the biblical narrative of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) and is often used to justify such a negative view.

*Genesis 11:1 Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. 2 And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. 3 Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. 4 And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." 5 But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. 6 And the LORD said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. 7 "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." 8 So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. 9 Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.*

- When you closely consider the account at Babel, you will be surprised to realize that God's confusion of "tongues" or languages at Babel was not a curse but more a tool of God's grace.
- What was the sin of Babel – it was not simply pride in trying to unify the world.
- The main sin at Babel was humanity attempting to define its identity apart from God.

*Genesis 11:4 And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."*

- Making a name for yourself goes beyond becoming famous, or growing a business – a name says a lot about ones identity.
- Names are supposed to capture a person's essence or character; you are what your name is, so to speak. So, making a name here also means they are trying to define who they are apart from God.

## **RADICAL IN OUR DIVERSITY PRT 2**

- And the word “babel” in the Babylonian language means “gate of god”- the Babel builders sought for themselves to be “the gate of god,” a heaven on earth.
- Theirs was going to be a society that was going to be defined by technology, politics and religious means.
- But “babel” in Hebrew is “confusion” or even, “folly”. So, Genesis mocks the Babylonians: they think they are building heaven on earth, but in reality, they are confused and foolish.
- By implication, God’s confusion of them is a means to prevent them from committing the grievous sin of idolatry
- God’s intervention and creation of diverse languages actually forced them to fulfill God’s original command in Gen. 1:28 to “*fill the earth and subdue it,*”
- The point is human cultural and linguistic diversity, then, fulfills a redemptive purpose in God’s plan, and is not a curse.

### **3. Sin distorted diversity**

- The entrance of sin made diversity a basis of idolatry, where hierarchical structures emerged among humanity.
- Fallen human diversity is often misdirected toward serving an idol that takes God’s place in the center of that culture.
- Such idolatries are always embodied in ideologies or worldviews that become systemic in a culture or community.
- The unity that was meant to be found in our diversity was put asunder or was broken up by the fall into sin.
- The disintegration of diversity resulted in individualism, pluralism, relativism, uniformity and collectivism
- Racism takes advantage of this disintegration, which leads to - only those like us and those not like us.
- Let’s talk more about race
  - There is actually no scientific evidence to support the categorization of humanity into biological ‘races’ based on physical traits such as skin color, eye color and nose width.
  - Unfortunately, these insignificant physical traits are given social significance by ideology.

## **RADICAL IN OUR DIVERSITY PRT 2**

- We have been accustomed to think that these physical differences amount to some moral and social difference – such as intelligence, goodness, beauty, honesty, etc.
- Such thinking is rooted in a distorted ideology, not in creation. Because this ideology is systemic in our culture, it has affected all of us.
- In systemic racism, a racist worldview is captured in the policies, practices, norms and symbols of social institutions, organizations, communities and cultures.
- Racism is not explicitly taught; rather we are caught in its web. There are systemic racist images via popular movies, TV and advertising that capture our imaginations
- Racism is not simply an individual behavior and attitude problem. It is bigger, wider and deeper than that: it is a systemic sin.

### **4. Biblical view to diversity enables reconciliation of people to each other**

- The desire of God, which can be traced even in the Old Testament was to restore the distorted diversity.
- God's redemption plan includes blessing "all the nations" through Abraham (Gen. 18:18, 26:4),
- God wants to make his house "a house of prayer for all nations" (Isa. 56:7). Ethnic identity is always subordinate to spiritual identity.
- Whilst language was confused at Babel, language was unified at Pentecost, the event of Pentecost reveals God's heart for human reconciliation.
- In that event (Acts 2:1-12), God equipped a mono-cultural group of disciples to do cross-cultural outreach in order to establish a multi-cultural church.
- They were enabled by the Holy Spirit to praise the Lord in different native tongues – the gospel was being opened up to every culture and race.

*Acts 2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. 5 And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. 6 And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. 7 Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? 8 "And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? 9 "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 "Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 "Cretans and Arabs--we hear them speaking in our own*

## **RADICAL IN OUR DIVERSITY PRT 2**

*tongues the wonderful works of God." 12 So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "Whatever could this mean?"*

- It is amazing that the first Christian outreach event after Jesus' ascension was an inter-cultural, cross-cultural outreach.
- One can even argue from this that God's default church is an inter-cultural church, NOT a mono-cultural one.

### **5. The church is God's vehicle for the reconciliation of all things**

- It is important to realize that our common faith does automatically remove our cultural differences.
- The game changer is this; our differences no longer define our identity.

*Galatians 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (NIV)*

- This scripture is a call to break down any existing barriers and inequalities between us.
- The way we are saved is great leveler among difference culture – we are saved by faith and not by works.
- God stepped into the life of Peter and broke the stereotypes he had towards the gentiles – Acts 10.
- The church cannot operate on the same paradigm as the world – the church is the only organization that has the capacity to deal with the distorted views of diversity.
- In order for that reality to be realized, every Christian needs to be a faithful and obedient agent of reconciliation for God.
- We are called to be faithful agents, not agents who sit on our hands.

### **Acknowledgements**

Adopted and adapted from an article: *A Biblical View of Diversity (2012)* – by Shiao Chong.