

Emergence Statement on Racial Unity

This statement is intended to provide clarity and direction on our response as a church to the important issues surrounding race that have gained prominence in our national discourse. As with everything, our aim is to remain faithful to the Scriptures, and to continue to learn and grow in accordance with God's revealed will to his church. We approach these issues with a genuine desire to foster unity within the body of Christ. Together, we denounce the evil of racism and grieve over the terrible effects it has had and continues to have on our society, including the ways it hurts people within our church.

Our priority is to cultivate a welcoming, loving, and truthful community of believers who glorify God in all things. The church is a place where believers point each another to Jesus by serving one another and placing the needs of others over their own.¹ Loving our neighbors as ourselves means that we must remain diligent and attentive to each other's needs as brothers and sisters in Christ.² This includes being aware of ways that we have failed to do this, as well as repentance aimed at greater obedience and Christlikeness.³

Placed in the midst of an unbelieving world, the church needs to set an example of holiness, love, reconciliation, and harmony.⁴ It is our job to show the world the love of Jesus, displayed in the gospel, and in the one body of Christ, which is by definition a community of diverse individuals,⁵ knit together in love, by one Spirit, with one faith, under the banner of one mission, to reach all people with the gospel.⁶ When we fail to do this, we damage our witness, and both believers and unbelievers are left to turn to those who do not know God for answers and direction in thinking about some of the most pressing issues of our day.

We believe that the views expressed in this document reflect the example given to us by our Lord Jesus. He taught us to remove the logs from our own eyes before seeking to help our neighbors with the specks in theirs,⁷ and to do unto others what we would wish others to do to us.⁸ He showed kindness to the weak⁹ as well as the powerful.¹⁰ He challenged people to look beyond their temporary needs, no matter how pressing, to matters of eternal significance.¹¹ He welcomed both tax collectors and sinners,¹² as well as zealous keepers of the law.¹³ He called

¹ John 13:12–17; Philippians 2:1–11.

² First John 3:16–19.

³ Ephesians 4:1–3; Luke 6:40.

⁴ First Thessalonians 4:7; Hebrews 12:14; John 13:34–35; Ephesians 2:16; Romans 12:16; 15:5; Colossians 3:14.

⁵ Revelation 5:9–10.

⁶ Ephesians 4:4–6; Matthew 28:18–20.

⁷ Matthew 7:1–5 (Luke 6:41–42).

⁸ Matthew 7:12–14.

⁹ Matthew 8:1–4 (Mark 1:40–45; Luke 5:12–16); 8:28–34 (Mark 5:1–20; Luke 8:26–40); 9:27–34; 12:9–14 (Mark 3:1–6; Luke 6:6–11); 14:34–36 (Mark 6:53–56); 15:21–31; 17:14–21 (Mark 9:14–29); 20:29–34; 21:14–17; Mark 1:21–28 (Luke 4:31–37), 29–34; 8:22–26; Luke 13:10–17; 14:1–6; 16:19–31; John 5:1–17; chapter 9.

¹⁰ Matthew 8:5–13 (Luke 7:1–10); 9:18–26 (Mark 5:21–43; Luke 8:41–56); Luke 7:11–17; 19:1–10; John 3:1–22; 4:46–54.

¹¹ Matthew 9:1–8 (Mark 2:1–12; Luke 5:18–26).

¹² Matthew 9:9–13 (Mark 2:13–17); 21:28–32; Luke 7:36–50.

¹³ Matthew 10:4; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15.

family all who do the will of the Father.¹⁴ He rejoiced at that the Father had revealed the kingdom of God to those he compared to “little children.”¹⁵ He took up his cross and called us to do the same daily.¹⁶ He hated hypocrisy¹⁷ and taught us to be humble servants in his kingdom who take sin seriously but are quick to forgive.¹⁸ He taught love of God and of our neighbors as the supreme ethic to guide our lives,¹⁹ and that we are neighbors with all people, regardless of history and regardless of groups.²⁰ He exalted the generosity of a poor widow as an example for us all.²¹ And he gave his life as a ransom for sin and was raised so that we can all be equally forgiven and justified before the Father.²²

In order to apply the gospel to the issues surrounding racial unity in the body of Christ, Emergence is committed to the following values:

- Recognizing the Scriptures as our supreme authority for instruction on difficult social issues, including race. We believe that the Bible gives us the tools and perspectives needed to realize God’s vision of the church as one family of believers united in Christ.²³
- Acknowledging that it is easy to overlook the struggles of people from diverse cultural backgrounds, and therefore being willing to listen to one another’s perspectives and life experiences.²⁴
- Providing a welcoming environment for people of all racial backgrounds to be equal and valuable parts of our body.²⁵ We want to be aware of the ways we each make people from other backgrounds feel uncomfortable or undervalued, and we want to grow from that awareness.
- Encouraging everyone in our church, especially our members, to pursue meaningful friendships with one another despite differences of ethnicity and culture, as well as age, politics, income level, and anything else that could serve to divide us.²⁶
- Learning to practice wise cross-cultural ministry that upholds the dignity of people from diverse backgrounds by encouraging everyone to minister both within the church body and to their own communities.²⁷

¹⁴ Matthew 12:46–50 (3:31–35; Luke 8:19–21); 25:31–46.

¹⁵ Luke 10:21–24.

¹⁶ Matthew 16:24–28 (Mark 8:34–38; Luke 9:23–27).

¹⁷ Matthew 15:1–28 (Mark 7:1–13); 21:12–13 (Mark 11:15–19; Luke 19:45–47; John 2:13–17), 28–32; 23:1–36 (Luke 11:37–54).

¹⁸ Matthew 18 (Mark 9:33–37; Luke 9:46–48); 20:20–28 (Mark 10:35–45); Luke 17:7–10; 18:9–14; John 13:12–20.

¹⁹ Matthew 22:34–40 (Mark 12:28–34).

²⁰ Luke 10:25–37; John 4:1–45.

²¹ Mark 12:41–44 (Luke 21:1–4).

²² Isaiah 53:5–6; Matthew 17:23; 20:28; Mark 5:24; Luke 24:39; John 3:16; Acts 2:23, 36; 5:30; Romans 3:21–26; 1 Corinthians 15:1–3; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 1:7–10; 1 Timothy 2:6; 1 Peter 3:18.

²³ John 17:11, 17; 2 Timothy 3:14–16.

²⁴ Acts 6:1–6; Numbers 27:1–11; 36:1–12; Isaiah 1:16–17.

²⁵ Galatians 3:28–29; Colossians 3:11; 1 Peter 1:1.

²⁶ First Corinthians 1:10; 3:1–3; 12:14–27; Ephesians 4:3; Colossians 3:14.

²⁷ First Peter 4:10–11; John 4:28–30, 39–42; Acts 16:1–3.

- Engaging in cross-cultural conversations with humility, openness, and respect, knowing that the most loving and wise course of action is sometimes not obvious and that the Lord forms and teaches us through one another.²⁸

All of us are aware of how conversations surrounding these issues can easily turn toxic. As Christians, we are obligated to rise above this, which means engaging in difficult conversations in a manner that builds one another up and facilitates the unity of the Spirit in the bond of love.²⁹ Our goal is to honor Christ’s reconciling work by fostering an environment where people can have honest conversations about important topics, which at times may include disagreements. We strive to challenge one another with good ideas that may be uncomfortable, and to give one another space to ask questions, process new concepts, and sometimes reach different conclusions. We welcome all views that maintain both our core statement of faith and the values stated above, and we respect one another in the Spirit of good faith that those who abide by these are walking in love. We urge our members to be sensitive in discussing such topics, knowing that none of us are experts. Our objective is to challenge ourselves, while giving one another room to grow.

The following list is given to state Emergence’s position on certain terms around which much of the current conversation has centered. It is not our intention to restrict the use of these terms, nor do we mandate that everyone within our church agree with everything written below. We urge our members, when using (or not using) such language and concepts, to exercise wisdom and discernment within the boundaries of the values stated above.

Race

Because of the abusive ways in which the **unbiblical concept of race** been used in human society, as well as its arbitrariness and imprecision, we strive to not use the term to describe people of any group. A more constructive way to understand one another is in terms of ethnicity, culture, ancestry, or place of origin.³⁰

While we strive to use better terms than *race* to describe one another, the use of the concept in describing some phenomena is understandable, particularly when describing situations that have arisen from the sinful abuse of it (e.g., racism, racial bias, racial disparity, etc.).

Racism

We understand racism to be an ideology that uses of the concept of race to devalue and/or oppress certain people and groups. People or things are *racist* to the extent that they express racism. Racism is sin and is unacceptable for all people, especially followers of Christ.³¹ We

²⁸ Proverbs 27:17; Galatians 2:11–14; Colossians 3:12–17; Hebrews 5:14.

²⁹ Romans 15:1–7; 1 Corinthians 14:12; Ephesians 4:15–16; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; 2 Timothy 1:7.

³⁰ Genesis 10; Acts 2:8–11.

³¹ Genesis 1:26–27; 5:1; 9:6; Psalm 8:5–6; James 3:9.

urge people in our church to be aware of ways we have been conditioned by our society to hold ideas and attitudes that are racially biased.

We acknowledge and decry the fact that many American churches have both wittingly and unwittingly contributed to or made peace with racism. We repent of the ways we have failed to speak out against its evils with the strength and intentionality that is required by God's command to truly love our neighbors.³² At the same time, we stridently affirm that the Spirit of God, working in our hearts, through the power of the gospel, has the power to overcome racism and that Christians are able to live lives of reconciliation with one another in a way that is pleasing to the Lord.³³

We acknowledge that sanctification is a process that will never be completed in this life, and so, as with any sin, there will always be room for repentance and growth.³⁴

Systemic Racism

Because all human beings are sinful by both nature and choice, it is inevitable that the systems and institutions we create will also be sinful.³⁵ Racism is one way that human systems and institutions reflect the depravity and ignorance of those who create them. There is no remedy for this apart from Christ.³⁶ For these reasons, neither governmental control nor freedom in themselves can remedy oppression and injustice. While progress has been made to rid many institutions of racism, systemic racism still exists, both in the effects of such oppression from the past, and in the ways it remains to be addressed.

Social Justice

The sad neglect of biblically mandated justice in churches has created a situation where many Christians, thirsty to see this need met, have turned to secular versions of it. These usually have some overlap with what we find described in Scripture, and yet also fall short in significant ways. True justice acknowledges that all human beings are created in the image of God and are therefore worthy of dignity, respect, and love.³⁷ It also acknowledges several obligations shared by all followers of Christ: (1) to generously help others, not out of compulsion but out of love;³⁸ (2) to repent of and correct oppression and suffering which we have caused and in which we have personally participated;³⁹ (3) to join in the struggle and defense of the oppressed and

³² Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:37–40; Luke 10:25–37; Romans 13:8–10; Galatians 5:13–16; James 2:8–13.

³³ Colossians 1:9–12.

³⁴ First Kings 8:46; Proverbs 20:9; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Matthew 6:11–12; Romans 6:12–14, 19, 22; Philippians 3:12–14; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; 1 John 1:8–10.

³⁵ Genesis 6:5–6, 11–12; Isaiah 1, 5; Romans 5:12–21; 7:21–24; Ephesians 2:12–15; 3:23; Revelation 18.

³⁶ Romans 6; 7:24–8:11; Galatians 2:16, 20–21; 3:3.

³⁷ See n. 15.

³⁸ Deuteronomy 15:7–8; Ezekiel 18:5–9; Matthew 25:31–46; 2 Corinthians 8:1–4; 9:6–7; Hebrews 13:1; James 2:14–17; 1 John 2:7–11; 3:10, 16–18; 4:7–8, 19–21.

³⁹ Isaiah 58; Jeremiah 7:5–7; Luke 19:1–10.

suffering;⁴⁰ (4) to exercise the principles of justice without favoritism;⁴¹ (5) to uphold the truth of the gospel and its proclamation as the highest and most necessary form of love.⁴²

“Social justice” refers to the application of justice to society-wide problems, which includes many good and godly pursuits. However, because the expression can also reflect interests that conflict with biblical morality, we urge discretion when using it. In certain contexts, it may be wise to speak of justice with qualifiers that do not have this degree of cultural baggage (e.g., justice for the poor, weak, oppressed, etc.). We also acknowledge that Christians may disagree on what actions and/or policies to pursue in order to bring about just results, and sometimes even what just results would look like.

Black Lives Matter

We affirm the statement “black lives matter” because it is true.⁴³ At the same time, there are ideas, goals, and policy proposals advocated by the Black Lives Matter organization that do not reflect biblical morality. Therefore, Emergence does not support the organization or encourage its leaders to do so. Because of the ways the phrase and the organization are conflated in popular culture, we recommend that Christians find other ways to voice their support of black lives in their struggle against injustice that do not involve sending confusing messages that can inadvertently communicate support of ideas that are unwise or immoral.

Moreover, while the phrases such as “blue lives matter” and “all lives matter” are also true, we urge our Christian brothers and sisters to not offer them as a retort to *black lives matter*, for similar reasons that we counsel against using the phrase *black lives matter*. These phrases are often used to deflect attention off certain injustices, and can be taken as an invalidation of the truth affirmed by the statement *black lives matter*, even when that is not the intention. The response to cries against injustice should be to seek justice with truth and understanding in the spirit of humility and compassion.

Because of our obligation to live with wisdom in our walks with one another and outsiders, and to not put stumbling blocks in the way of the gospel, we need to be sensitive in using language that is needlessly combative, ambiguous, and likely to cause unnecessary offense.⁴⁴

Law Enforcement

We support law enforcement as a good and God-ordained instrument for maintaining peace, justice, and tranquility in our society.⁴⁵ Law officers, whether federal, state, or local, should be respected and treated with dignity and gratitude. They should be supported with the resources, training, and trust that they need to carry out their work in ways that serve the public peace.

⁴⁰ Deuteronomy 27:19; Isaiah 1:17; Jeremiah 21:12; 22:3; Luke 10:25–37; Philemon; James 1:27; 2:9.

⁴¹ Exodus 23:2; Leviticus 19:15; Deuteronomy 1:17; 16:19–20; Psalm 82:2; Proverbs 24:23.

⁴² John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:3–11; Ephesians 6:18–20; Philippians 1:27–28; Colossians 1:21–23, 28; 1 Thessalonians 2:3–4, 9; 1 John 4:9–10.

⁴³ Genesis 4:9–10; 9:6; Deuteronomy 19:13; 21:8–9; Proverbs 6:17; Jeremiah 22:3; Joel 3:19.

⁴⁴ Ephesians 4:1–3; Colossians 3:12–13; 1 Peter 5:5.

⁴⁵ John 19:11; Romans 13:1–7; 1 Peter 2:13–17.

Officers who unjustly betray the public trust and harm those they are sworn to protect should be held accountable to the fullest extent of the law,⁴⁶ and we should oppose policies and procedures that either purposely or inadvertently harm our communities and so stand in the way of justice.

White Fragility

“White fragility” refers to the difficulty that white people have when they are confronted with accusations of racism, and is often manifested in denial, deflection, avoidance, and other defensive postures. It should come as no surprise to anyone familiar with the Scriptures that the natural response of people being confronted by sin is to use such tactics.⁴⁷ And racism certainly is a sin that should be confronted.

However, the idea that any and all denials of racism are examples of white fragility is false. Constructive Christian dialogue cannot flourish in an environment where all accusations of wrongdoing or wrongful thinking are taken as fact and all denials are problematized. Further, the claim that denials of white fragility are in themselves evidence of white fragility (or racism) is a kind of circular thinking, commonly referred to as a Kafka Trap, wherein the denial of something is in itself taken as evidence that the person is guilty of what she is denying (e.g., “only someone with white fragility would deny showing white fragility”).

For these reasons, we advise discretion when using the concept of white fragility in Christian dialogue about ethnic and cultural issues. It may be preferable simply to understand that people may be defensive when accused of sin as horrible as racism, or may be unaware that they have racial biases. Or it may be that our accusations are false.

These comments should not be taken as an exhaustive response to the book, *White Fragility*, which would require more space than is available here.

Critical Race Theory

For most readers, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the most opaque concept on this list, and therefore requires some explaining. Critical Theory is a branch of social science that applies post-Marxist and postmodern concepts to explain various forms of inequity in terms of power dynamics that are masked by dominant forces in human culture. Its advocates argue that true social progress will be realized only when hidden forms of oppression are exposed and power is transferred from oppressor groups to oppressed groups. One’s status is defined primarily not by their own individual choices, achievements, and failures, but by virtue of their membership in such groups and, accordingly, where they are mapped on the grid of intersectionality. Free speech and liberal dialogue are typically discouraged, because it is alleged that those in power dominate such discourses through their access to various forms of privilege.

Critical Race Theory brings some important ideas to the table that can be helpful in establishing cultural unity within the church. We should be aware of the ways people we love suffer

⁴⁶ Genesis 9:6; see n. 25.

⁴⁷ Genesis 3:7–14; Matthew 18:15–17; 19:16–22; John 8:33, 39, 41, 43–45.

oppression. And we should care about how power is unjustly attained, hoarded, and used to the disadvantage of others, and do what we can to correct this.⁴⁸ But there are many aspects of CRT that are false and/or purposely designed to erode the fabric of liberal democracy, and which will foster division rather than unity within the church. If all narratives and truth claims are truly veiled attempts to hoard power, then so are those made by proponents of CRT. If people embedded in dominant culture(s) are blinded by socially constructed reality, then the same applies for people looking at it through the lens of CRT. This means that CRT itself is part of this socially constructed reality. And if worldly power is a corrupting force, then there is no reason to think that societies modeled after the priorities of critical theories would be more just than those they seek to change. The history of every Marxist revolution testifies to the validity of these concerns.

Critical Race Theory is reductionistic in that it attributes all disparities of outcomes between people of different cultural and ethnic groups to systemic oppression and power imbalances. While we agree that such dynamics do play a role in inequality, certainly the personal choices and responsibilities of individuals also have a big effect on people's standing within society. CRT also tends to overlook the universality of human sin by assigning greater moral value to oppressed groups and encouraging self-righteousness.⁴⁹ Finally, we are concerned that CRT discourages and inhibits forgiveness and reconciliation. Shaming and denouncing people rarely bring about such outcomes.⁵⁰

Corporate Guilt

We see no biblical support for the idea that God holds us guilty for the sins of other individuals in groups to which we belong, simply by virtue of our membership in those groups. Biblical passages that have been used to argue otherwise, such as Joshua 7, Daniel 9, and Ezra 9 are less than convincing because these all belong to God's covenant with Israel, which was unique in this respect. Moreover, there are key passages in the Old Testament itself that explicitly dismantle this system in anticipation of the New Covenant.⁵¹ Nor do we think that the idea of corporate guilt can be sustained biblically by an appeal to original sin (space does not allow us to expound this in detail).

This needs to be balanced against the reality that there is such a thing as corporate sin, and that God does hold us guilty for our participation in it.⁵² We have a responsibility to speak out against such sin and to come to the aid of those who are victimized by it. Perpetuation of oppression and complacency regarding it is sin.⁵³ But the distinction must be maintained—we are guilty by virtue of our participation in personal and corporate sin, not by virtue of our membership in groups in which others have sinned.

⁴⁸ See n. 23–25.

⁴⁹ See n. 25.

⁵⁰ Matthew 18:1–25; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12–13.

⁵¹ Jeremiah 31:29–30; Ezekiel 18.

⁵² Matthew 23:34–35; Acts 2:22–23; 3:14–15; 5:30; Revelation 19:20–21.

⁵³ Exodus 23:1; Leviticus 20:4–5; Deuteronomy 22:1–4; Isaiah 1:17; Amos 6:4–7; Luke 10:31–32.

White Supremacy

We define “white supremacy” as the belief that white people and white culture are either consciously believed or assumed to be superior to people of color. This belief and its effects are sinful and should be opposed by all Christians. However, it has become popular in our day to label anything that is biased in favor of white people (or can possibly be construed as such) as “white supremacist.” We see this as needlessly incendiary. It is reasonable to expect that when people hear *white supremacy* they think of a purposefully hateful attitude towards people of color. It is therefore inappropriate to expand this expression’s meaning to encompass anything or anyone interpreted as betraying racially problematic views, even and especially if those ideas are not consciously held.

White Privilege

White privilege refers to the benefits accrued to white people in our society. This would include not having to be concerned about being judged by the color of one's skin, having one's own ethnicity overrepresented in public life, and being able to talk about race without being perceived as self-interested. We acknowledge that white people have privileges in our society that people of color do not.

Because many different forms of privilege exist (economic, educational, familial, etc.), we encourage people in our church to use the privilege they have in order to lift others up in ways that affirm their worth and dignity.⁵⁴

Politics

We hope that the remarks in this statement will not be taken as overtly political and will be embraced by all our church regardless of our individual positions on the political spectrum. We have aimed to give a perspective that reflects wise biblical principles to be shared among Christians who care about the gospel as of first importance and seek to honor the unity that God has given us in Christ.

We affirm that Christians who care about people of other cultures and ethnicities can, in good conscience, vote for either major American political party, or other third parties. We have a less than perfect system, in which voters are called to make judgment calls on which issues are important, whose policy proposals most align with their values on those issues, and what might be the consequences, intended and unintended, of different policies when implemented. Every election cycle, we are presented only with flawed candidates from whom to choose and must decide which one will, on balance, bring the most desirable outcomes (or prevent undesirable outcomes). It is understandable that Christians acting in good faith will come to different conclusions on these matters. We expect the members of our church to be sensitive to this, and to

⁵⁴ First Timothy 6:17–19.

not discuss politics in ways that alienate others who may disagree. Jesus is our king, and his teaching needs to guide us in our social and political lives.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Daniel 7:14; Romans 10:8–9; Revelation 17:14; 19:16.