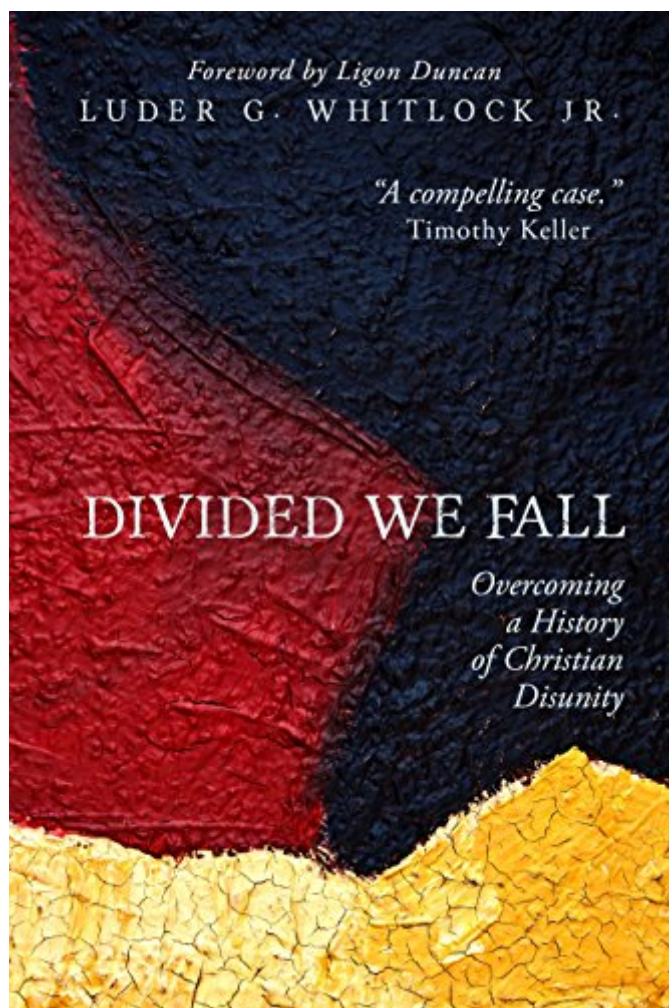


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# Divided We Fall: Overcoming A History Of Christian Disunity



## Synopsis

DIVISION. POLARIZATION. STRIFE. That's life-as-usual in today's world. But it shouldn't describe the church. It's time for Christians to listen, reach out, and work together for the common good. But how can God's people achieve true unity in a fallen world? What sort of cooperation is actually possible? Luder Whitlock has an answer—a good one—and an appeal. He shows how we can learn from studying God's views on church unity and from historical schisms as well as agreements. And, once we embrace the goal of unity, Whitlock points us to specific, realistic steps we can take to realize a united community under God.

“Whitlock is a trusted voice for Christians because he evidences deep wisdom, compassion, and maturity, as well as intellect and skill. This book calls the church to gospel unity in ways that will provoke you to think, ponder, and pray.”

—RUSSELL MOORE, President, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

“An unusually helpful challenge to follow Christ as head of the church. Biblically rooted, historically informed, and pastorally helpful, this book gracefully fulfills its purpose of strengthening unity and community in Christ's church.”

—MARK A. NOLL, Author, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*

“As the relevance of the church is increasingly called into question, visible unity becomes essential to the fruitful witness of Christ's people. . . . A must-read for all those interested in experiencing the joy of real community with fellow believers.”

—CARMEN FOWLER LABERGE, President, Presbyterian Lay Committee

LUDER G. WHITLOCK JR. is executive director of the CNL Charitable Foundation and the Seneff Family Foundation, president of Excelsis, and minister at large of First Presbyterian Church of Orlando.

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## Customer Reviews

Great read! This new book by the Christian evangelical elder statesman, Luder G. Whitlock, Jr., was fifty years in the making, and with a front row seat to the matters, meetings and maneuverings of organizational discord within the global Christian church during that same time, the author has been a material witness to all of the shared circumstances of which he writes. But the analysis, integration and timely recommendations in this provocative little book are uniquely his own. Quoting from a diversity of authors like Peter Drucker, Jonathan Haidt, and Wendell Berry in support of his point, Luder Whitlock reaches far beyond his theological, academic cloister to drive home the idea that enough is enough already! The historical process of selfish, independent and achievement-driven church growth in American Evangelicalism has run its course. The time has come for individual Christians (starting with a new generation of church leaders) to show some self-restraint. The time has come to check our competitive and self-serving, entrepreneurial impulses at the door of every church in the land in a coordinated effort to promote a spirit of love, unity and gospel Truth to a dangerous and wanting world. Without sacrificing shared personal convictions, the time has come for evangelical Christians everywhere to focus on the causes of love that unify the Christian body rather than to destroy it. As, perhaps, the first person to have read it cover to cover on the very same day (and half-way through the night!) after it arrived new from the publisher, I will not review this book now in categorical detail. My desire is not to spoil the occasion for others whom I trust will enjoy reading it with the same fresh eyes and anticipation for positive change in Church history that I have experienced when encountering its contents for the first time. Short of providing any real spoilers for new readers, however, I will say that *Divided We Fall* is a suitable and seamless follow-on to Luder Whitlock's first book published in 2000, *The Spiritual Quest: Pursuing Christian Maturity*. Weaving these two works together is the life of the author who has learned through many years of interpersonal experience and significant, deep friendships the importance of displaying diplomatic sensitivity, elementary acts of kindness and a

commitment to loving others not like ourselves as a foundation for mature Christian expression and the ultimate promise of achieving unity in Christ this side of eternity. Bravo! Dr. Luder G. Whitlock. (FIVE stars!)"We have been given this ministry of reconciliation..."Donald Wilson BushMontreat, North CarolinaMay 21, 2017(FIVE stars!)

A clear and comprehensive record of the sad and foolish divisions in Christ's church and then wise and godly advice for the way ahead. Jesus was right: "be one and then people will believe." Be one around the Gospel, that is. Right now believers must get with it and not give up, Whitlock shows how not to give up on loving each other. Buy it right now and read it many times, and act on it, and Jesus will be glorified.

What might be expected to be a diatribe is instead a biblically reasoned and hopeful appeal to the highest and best calling of Christian unity. Admittedly himself an adherent of the Reformed tradition and addressing foremost members of his particular tribe as a proponent of the "Together for the Gospel" movement, Whitlock's biblical analysis and exhortations are much more broadly relevant. He asserts that, "organizational differences and other expressions of diversity [need] not preclude [an] understanding or realization of unity" (xvi). At the same time, he does not superficially advocate for or anticipate a new effort at structural unity. In the end, unity and genuine mutuality among orthodox believers with whom we differ often fails not because we actively refuse it but because we passively confront it and relegate it to low priority in our eagerness to be about the Lord's work. When we will realize that a robust expression of oneness in Christ is central to the Lord's work among us and to our witness of Him in an increasingly skeptical and cynical age?

Book Review - Divided We Fall by Luder G. Whitlock Jr. One of the most common criticisms against Christianity that I encounter from both Christians and non-Christians alike is that we are a divided church with a history full of divisions. This is a valid criticism and one which Christians everywhere should take to heart. Christ himself told us that his desire is that we would be unified. Why? Christ gives us two reasons in John 17.20-23: 1) that the world would believe that Christ was sent by the Father, and 2) that the world would know that the Father loves us in the same manner in which the Father loves Christ. "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may

be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me." That sad reality is that the church is not unified. There have been many attempts to unify the church and all of these attempts have their own understanding of what it means for the Church to be one. Who should we unite to? Are we to be one in doctrine? Practice? Liturgy? Should we all submit to one central head of the Church? Whatever the answer, one thing is clear and that is that the Church is fragmented and our lack of unity contributes in some way to unbelief. *Divided We Fall* by Luder G. Whitlock Jr. is a book which was written to address the issue of unity and disunity within the Church. Whitlock starts off by establishing the biblical call for unity. After this, he takes the reader on a fascinating tour of church history and the many attempts to unify the Church. This was by far the best succinct abridgment on the topic that I have ever read and gives the reader just enough information to understand the key historical moments. The ample footnotes provide a good launching pad for further study if desired. Next Whitlock begins to develop the doctrine of the communion of the saints (colloquially known as "body life"). This includes a historical treatment of the communion of the saints as well as a bit of flushing out the concept in a user-friendly manner. From here, Whitlock looks at the ecumenical movement, schisms, and sectarianism before addressing some challenges and concerns with attempts at unifying the Body of Christ. Finally Whitlock concludes the book with some well reasoned and constructive steps that believers can take to begin the process of unifying the church. One of the things that I really appreciated while reading *Divided We Fall* is that Whitlock leaves plenty of room for diversity within the Body of Christ. That is to say that he doesn't insist that unity means that we all hold to the same interpretation of scripture as long as we are committed to some key orthodox doctrines. This leaves room for say, a Presbyterian and a Baptist to maintain their doctrinal distinctives while still striving for unity. Whitlock understands that unity and mutual affection between believers does not mean that they have to agree on every doctrine. Instead, unity is characterized by love, kindness, and a willingness to associate and dialogue with those who believe differently. *Divided We Fall* is a wonderful book on Church unity that seeks to honor God and his desire for unity. At the same time, Whitlock avoids the common mistakes of most ecumenical attempts which sacrifice orthodoxy for the sake of getting along. *Divided We Fall* also avoids the extreme approach to unity which insists that the church must be unified under one human head and share a common liturgy. This book outlines an excellent example of the type of unity which Christ prayed for and the church will be all the better for heeding Whitlock's wisdom. Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free from P&R Publishing

in exchange for an online review. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255: "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

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