

United We Stand, Divided We Fall

“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” — The Apostle Paul

One of the hallmarks of America’s history is a fundamental, shared belief in the need for its people to be united. A popular song during the American Revolution was titled “The Liberty Song,” which contains the lyrics, “Then join hand in hand, brave Americans all, by uniting we stand, dividing we fall, in so righteous a cause let us hope to succeed, for Heaven approves of such generous deed.” The phrase “united we stand, divided we fall” has been a motto of this country ever since; indeed, the word “united” is even part of our country’s name.

While most acknowledge the need for unity in our society and governance, and are troubled when Americans are divided, for those who profess Christ as their Lord there is a type of division that is infinitely worse—divisions in the body of Christ. By one estimate, the number of religious denominations in the U.S. exceeds 40,000, all of which teach and practice different beliefs. This vast number of religious organizations represents a dysfunctional and bewildering landscape of faith to one who would seek to know which church, if any, is the “right” church.

Regardless of what we might think of religious division, however, what is truly important is how God views it—does He condone it or oppose it? The Bible makes

it very clear that He unalterably opposes any variance from what He has commanded His people to do in service and worship to Him. During Old Testament times, God gave the nation of Israel the Ten Commandments which emphasize that He is a jealous God who requires that His people strictly obey His commands (Exodus 20). Moses, God’s chosen leader of the Israelites, warned his countrymen, “You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you,” (Deuteronomy 4:2). Nadab and Abihu, sons of Moses’ brother, Aaron, the High Priest, failed to follow this injunction by offering “profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them” and God killed them instantly with fire of His own (Leviticus 10:1-7).

Although some today believe that God is pleased with virtually any type of service or worship offered to Him, the New Testament is equally emphatic in the matter of strict adherence to God’s commands. The Apostle Paul, writing to the Galatians, warned, “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed,” (1:8). “For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds

to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book,” (Revelation 22:18-19).

Jesus’ expressed will is that all Christians be completely united. In the Garden of Gethsemane before His crucifixion, the Lord prayed, “that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me,” (John 17:21). Ephesians 4:4-5 teaches that there is but one God-authorized faith, regardless of how many unauthorized denominations mankind may create.

On the question of which church is the “right” church, Jesus said that He would build His church (Matthew 16:18), and we read in the book of Acts that He did so, starting in the city of Jerusalem, when the Apostle Peter preached the first Christian sermon (Acts 2). The same gospel was eventually preached to the entire known world during the time of the apostles; for several hundred years thereafter, the church that Christ built, with congregations around the world, was the only church in existence. That church,

in addition to its beginning in Jerusalem in fulfillment of prophecy, has numerous other defining characteristics which help identify it, including these:

- The Founder is Jesus Christ, and no man
- Recognizes no authority except the Bible
- “Headquarters” is Heaven, and no place on earth
- Members are called Christians, and accept no other appellation
- Believes Jesus’ words, “You shall know the truth”
- Organization, worship, and teaching follow the apostolic pattern
- Terms of membership are established by God, not denomination leaders

If you are searching for the “right” church, we would be glad to help you identify the church that Christ built, the original and eternal church, which has existed for nearly 2,000 years. Accept no substitutes!

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604 Yaxley Drive
Purcellville, VA
www.purcellvillecoc.org .
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