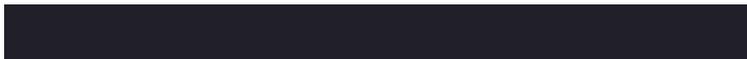




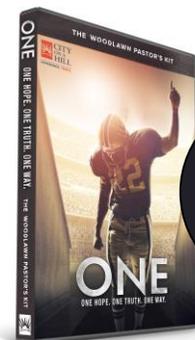
ONE

ONE HOPE. ONE TRUTH. ONE WAY.



SERMON ONE
ONE (The Woodlawn Study) Pastor's Kit

By Pastor Dave Stone | Southeast Christian Church
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ONE (THE WOODLAWN STUDY) PASTOR'S KIT

Week 1 Sermon: Building the Church by Tearing Down Walls

If you grew up or lived in the 60s, you know it was a time when America was racially segregated. In the early 70s, integration began to take place. This was a groundbreaking period, because no longer would the school a student attended be determined by the color of their skin. While that was a very wise and biblical decision, the first few years were delicate most of the time and sometimes dangerous. Not everyone—on either side—was open to looking beyond the surface to see someone's heart.

At the same time this was happening, there was a Christian revolution sweeping across the United States in the early 70s. A *Time Magazine* cover story called it *The Jesus Revolution*. It was a widespread, miraculous movement rooted in a very bold claim that came straight from Scripture in John 14:6 when Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me." There were countless programs and events where students in their teens and 20s unashamedly took a bold stand for Jesus. Campus Crusade got involved, and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes did, too. Those who made decisions didn't really care what others thought or if they would be accepted by their peers or co-workers—they *just wanted Jesus*. Nothing more, nothing less ... just Jesus. People who lived in Birmingham, Ala. in the 70s say it was a revival that lasted for a decade.

When you see the story of unity come to life, it begs the question: Is it possible for a spark to be ignited *for Christ*? Today? Now? Could it happen again in our schools and churches, on our college campuses and in our neighborhoods? Could a common commitment to Christ unite us in spite of racial diversity or tensions over socio-economic differences? And to get more personal, can spiritual revival take place and lead to unity in our nation?

In this six-week sermon series, we will focus on Christ and reaffirming our faith in Him. Back in the late 90s, evangelist E.V. Hill was interviewed before a Promise Keepers conference. The reporter asked, "What are 50,000 people going to do for two days?" Hill responded, "Well, we're going to talk about Jesus and worship Him." The surprised reporter said, "That's all?" The next day Hill said, "She doesn't realize how much that is."

In this series, make no mistake that Jesus will be the focus and the source from which these messages are derived.

In the first message, we're going to take a look at the church—this team that Christ is counting on to share the gospel and reach the world.

The original word from which we get the word “church” is the word “*ekklesia*.” It means “the called out ones” ... we are a fellowship that is different from the world. We are a group of Christ followers striving to be a representation of Christ. Sometimes we reduce the church down to merely a building or a place, but it's so much more than what we can relegate to merely brick and mortar at a specific location.

Today I want us to see that the church is people. If you turn to our text in Romans 16, you are going to think I told you incorrectly. It's just a list of more than two dozen names. If you're not careful, you'll miss out on what and who the church is.

In other words, in this letter, Paul gives a shout out to the people in the church at Rome with whom he has crossed paths and forged a friendship. He's saying that the church isn't just a place: it's people who are united by their faith in Jesus Christ ... and that's what makes it a church.

I'm going to give you three ways that we can build the church today so it remains the formidable force God intended it to be.

1. The Church is Built on Unity

Listen for the names—don't get too fixated on how they are pronounced. Listen to how diverse the early New Testament church was, and maybe we'll learn some lessons:

Romans 16:1-4: "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me. Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them." (Romans 16:1-4)

These church members were committed to the church. They served, and they risked their lives for Paul and the advancement of the gospel.

Paul goes on to begin listing the names of people he wants to say hi to:

Romans 16: 5-7: “Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia. Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.”

The last couple of names were people who had been imprisoned for their faith—perhaps they were imprisoned with Paul. The next few verses contain the names of several people who most commentators agree were slaves: Ampliatus and Urbanus, along with the household of Aristobulus and the household of Narcissus. There are several more names of slaves a little bit later in the passage, but the names of the leaders in the community also are included. In this list there are rich and poor, male and female, Jew and Gentile, slave and free.

This church in Rome crossed all sorts of cultural lines and was a microcosm of the city. Church is to be a melting pot of all cultures, ages, genders and socio-economic backgrounds. But that can’t happen if we evaluate people based on their earning potential, the neighborhood in which they live or the color of their skin.

INSERT YOUR OWN STORY HERE –or– REWORD AND USE THE EXAMPLE BELOW.

Several years ago, my brother Jeff shared something about his son Justin with me. They had some neighbors, who had a son, and who had become good friends. The husband, Solomon, is African American and the wife, Adrienne, is Caucasian. One day when Justin was about 8 years old, he came back from playing at their house, and he mentioned that his friend’s uncle was in town and at the house.

Out of curiosity, Jeff asked Justin, “Was the uncle Solomon’s brother or Adrienne’s brother?”

Justin said, “I don’t know.”

Jeff realized the racial connection hadn’t registered with his son, and he was glad Justin hadn’t noticed. He pressed in a little more, made it clearer and tried to help Justin with his deductive reasoning. He said, “Well if he was black, he was probably Solomon’s brother, and if he was white, he most likely was Adrienne’s brother.”

Justin nonchalantly said, “Oh, he was black.”

When Jeff told me that story, he smiled and said, “I guess when it comes to people, Justin is color blind. Wouldn’t it be great if all the adults in the world were/went color blind, too?”

What if we didn’t notice the skin color or ethnicity of an individual and saw them for what was on the inside?

A great place for this to start is within the church. We can break down these barriers and begin to see those in our community the way Jesus sees them and the way the church did at its inception, when it was purest.

Paul’s writings are not melodramatic, as if a church with incredible diversity in the areas of race, wealth and background was the exception. Instead, it’s as if it is the norm. Maybe that’s why the apostle Paul says over in Galatians 3:26-28:

“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

That’s a picture of the church and what it is to be. Maybe that’s why the church is called “the body of Christ.” Look at Romans 16:12:

“Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord. Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord.”

You’ll notice throughout the entire chapter that there is a true service component woven throughout the fabric of the church in Rome.

When you serve those who are hurting within the body of Christ, when you reach out to those outside to bring them in by meeting their needs—then and only then do we start to resemble the early New Testament church.

2. The Church is Built by Relationships

Look at Romans 16:13-15. The fact that Paul was involved in their lives is impressive.

“Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the other brothers and sisters with them. Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the Lord’s people who are with them.”

Did you hear all of those names? Each one represents someone with whom Paul made a connection. It may have been through some type of small serving group, it may have been through a house church worshipping together, a group that just studied the Bible or regularly prayed together. Whatever way the connections came about, they were close ones. They had connected with Jesus and one another. These weren’t merely acquaintances; they were friends and Paul knew them well.

Romans 16:16: “Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings.”

That probably sounds strange to you. Why did Paul command this *kissing* of one another? Well, it obviously is a cultural habit that was prevalent ... kind of like in France or Italy where they give a slight peck on the cheek. The intent is to greet people warmly, an expression that shows we care about the individuals. So, give a warm handshake, a pat on the back, a hug to a friend.

A number of years ago, a minister named John Russell was out of town on vacation with his wife, and the couple visited a church one Sunday night. After singing a few songs, the worship leader led into their greeting time by saying, “Instead of just shaking somebody’s hand, tonight I want you to say, ‘I love you’ to the people you greet.”

John’s immediate response was, “Oh brother, how manipulative, how awkward to say such a thing to a total stranger.” But compliantly he turned

around to find one of the most attractive young ladies he'd ever seen. She extended her hand, looked John in the eyes and said, "I love you." Before John could say anything, his wife Susan, leaned in and said, "We love you too!"

Here in our church, make certain that your greetings are genuine and not misleading!

Skip down in your Bible to Romans 16:23:

"Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings. Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings."

Let's go a layer deeper. Erastus was a man of position in the community. Quartus was a slave and didn't even have a "real" name. Quartus meant "the Number Four." But in the body of Christ, they are mentioned side by side.

It says in 1 Corinthians 12:25b-26:

"... so there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it."

Before you write something or repeat some rumor, think before you do so. If you are a member of this church, please realize that if you are divisive, if you badmouth another believer or you are constantly second guessing leadership decisions, then you are wounding the body of Christ. If you are a Christian, get this—it's a self-inflicted wound. The damage you are doing, in essence, hurts both Jesus and yourself.

Now with that in mind I want you to pay close attention to the next verse, especially within this context. It's almost comical, if you look at the different sections of it.

Romans 16:20: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you."

In other words, divisiveness, smooth talk and flattery come from Satan himself, and there is coming a day when God will take care of Him in swift and certain fashion. Paul doesn't say that Satan is going to be gradually

defeated in this battle ... no way! He's going to be crushed and obliterated. And who will do the crushing of this enemy? *The God of peace*. Then Paul adds ... but as for you—"The grace (not the crushing) of our Lord Jesus be with you" That's good news. The Christian will receive God's amazing grace instead of obliteration.

Clergyman Greg Laurie said, "The early church made a significant impact on its world, not because it was made up of great people, but because it was made up of faithful people."

In light of racially-driven upheavals, including those in Ferguson, Baltimore and Charleston, our country needs a change. This is a pivotal time in our culture, and the church can take the lead by setting an example in how we treat those of a different race, background or social class. When the church is unified, God is glorified.

Listen to a story that took place soon after slavery ended. An African American man had fallen on hard times and had no food. He heard of a wealthy white family who might be sympathetic to his plight, so he went to their house.

He walked up the front steps to the porch and knocked on the door. The woman who answered glanced quickly to the neighbors' house on the right and then to the one on the left. She whispered to the man, "Meet me on my back porch" and abruptly closed the door. Dutifully, the man went around to the back yard which was more secluded.

The woman came out on the back porch and handed him a basket of bread, saying, "Now, before you eat, we need to thank God for our food. Repeat after me, 'Our Father, who art in heaven' ..."

The black man respectfully began to pray, "*Your* Father, who art in heaven ..."

The woman stopped him and said, "No. Now just repeat after me, '*Our* Father, who art in heaven' ... "

Again, the man said, "*Your* Father, who art in heaven."

Exasperated, the woman asked, "Why do you insist on saying *your*

Father?”

“Well ma’am,” the man quietly replied, “If he was *our* Father, that would make us brother and sister. And if we were brother and sister, you wouldn't have made me come around to your back door.”

Sometimes we do a good thing, but we don't do the best thing, or we don't do the right thing. Psalm 133:1 tells us, “How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!” Why? *Because it's time.*

In the *Woodlawn* movie, when Tony Nathan chose to be on the Woodlawn team, he was putting himself under the authority of a coach. He would have to listen, obey and submit to the coach's leadership. The same applies to those who choose to follow Christ and be a part of his church.

When a person chooses to be a Christian, they are saying that they are going to listen to the Holy Spirit nudging them to make God-honoring decisions. They are going to obey God's Word and submit to Christ's leadership. The church is built on unity, and by relationships, and finally ...

3. The Church is Built for a Purpose

The church becomes a beautiful mosaic when it looks like the community and doesn't seem segregated. Someday, every tongue and tribe and nation will worship the Lord together in perfect harmony and unity.

When we serve side by side, with all our surface differences, God can do a new thing and a good thing in our lives and in the life of the church.

INSERT YOUR OWN STORY HERE –or– REWORD AND USE THE EXAMPLE BELOW.

A number of years ago, right after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast area, I made a visit down there with a team from our church. We began searching for a place for our church volunteers to stay on future mission trips.

With the Lord's help, we stumbled onto a campground that wasn't real far from one of the feeding centers. We spoke with a man named Earl who was about 70 years old. He was a volunteer who had come down to help

coordinate the relief efforts. He said they would love to have work groups from Southeast stay at the camp.

As we stood there, this gentleman quietly but intently explained to us why he had driven hundreds of miles to come down and volunteer. He said, "I'm not from the gulf coast, but as I was sitting at home watching the footage of the destruction on television, my heart started pounding. I just knew God wanted to use me, so I came down in my camper, and I'm living and working out of it."

He went on to explain that the camp was jointly owned and operated by the Amish and the Mennonites and that he had found incredible fulfillment through his service. About that time someone came up to talk with him, and I knew Earl was going to have to leave. As he was walking away, my curiosity overcame me and I blurted out, "So which are you? Amish or Mennonite?"

The eyes of this Christian servant began to well up, and he said to me, "I'm not Amish and I'm not a Mennonite. I belong to a church that is just trying to be a liaison for people to get to know Jesus and his Word."

As he headed off, I said under my breath, "So do I."

You see, we do. We belong to that same church. I want this church to be a church that treats everyone the same ... one that is more concerned with love than labels ... with the grace of God rather than the race of others ... an encouraging church in the community that focuses on Christ, rather than our denominational differences. Jesus prayed in John 17:20-21 ...

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be *one*, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

Have you ever seen a mosaic? If you look at a mosaic up close, it's really nothing more than a collection of broken, dirty, worthless pieces of glass. But in the hands of an artist, something beautiful is created. Individually, the pieces have no value, but they do when they are combined and placed in the hands of a creator.

I am just another broken piece who is trusting that God can work through my weakness and believing He can do the same with you. Through Christ, He can surround me with a bunch of other people who are broken. If you are looking for a perfect church, then keep on looking because this isn't it. It doesn't exist.

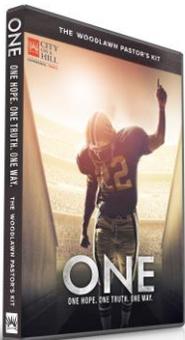
But if you are looking for a united church that speaks and serves as one ... if you are looking for a mosaic church that wants to embrace our differences and make them a strength ... then your search may be over. In this church, we are a colossal collection of Christ followers who are broken.

We look different, and we are at differing points in our faith. We are an eclectic assortment of colors and backgrounds, hopes and heritages, but there is something that ties us together ... or should I say Someone. We convene and commune to celebrate the only One who is able to fix our brokenness with his skill and his expertise. Somehow he blends us into his mosaic. His story intersects with our story, and as a result, our stories are never the same. He has ignited a spark in us that cannot be put out, and He can unite us in spite of our differences so we become one.

So bring your brokenness and your personal experiences—good and bad—and give them to God—because He's the only One who can make something beautiful out of the broken pieces of our life. And when the church is unified, God is glorified.

PRAYER: Father in heaven, by your spirit, will you help us to see one another as brothers and sisters who share the same Dad? Help us tear down walls instead of putting up fences. Take us out of our comfort zones and teach us to listen, love and learn from those who may be different from us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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