Olive Drive Church

Lesson 66: Thursday, Jan. 5th, 2016

**TEACHING NOTES**

**Q100. What is the *universal Church*?**

The universal Church is all the members of the body of Christ, made up of people from all around the world. It is all who are called out of darkness, regenerated, and set apart by God’s saving grace. It is all the genuine believers in Jesus.

**Let’s pray:**

**Now that we have the definition of the universal church, I want to share with you some other names we use when we are referring to the universal church.**

**The universal Church can be referred to as**: the saints, the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, His people, the called-out ones, God’s saved elect, and God’s saved chosen ones.

Let me make some clear distinctions before we dive in. The local church is the group of believers that you do life with and submit to its leadership. We must be committed to a local church where we serve, grow, and do life together. The universal Church is different in the sense of location and how we do life together. It would be impossible even in our day and age of social access for me to do life with all true believers everywhere in the world in the way I do life with you here. So, when we talk about the universal Church this is one of the ways that it is different from the local church.

Believers around the world belong to different local churches, however, if we are true believers, truly saved by God, then we all belong to the one universal Church- the one body of Christ. So, our first point tonight is:

P: 1 The universal Church is all the members of the body of Christ

**Ephesians 4:15-16** Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

We are part of a body and the head of this body is Jesus himself. So, who are the “we” in this passage? The “we” in this verse, in the most ultimate sense, is the universal Church. The “we” is anyone who is in Christ. If you have been saved by the grace of our Lord, then you are in Christ and are a part of the body of Christ.

Paul says it this way in Galatians:

(Galatians 3:27-29 ESV) [26] for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. [27] For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. [28] There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. [29] And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

This is what the universal Church is. Those of us who have been saved by God through faith are “IN” Christ or we have “put on Christ”. Verse 28 says there is no distinction. It is important that we understand the context here because this verse has unfortunately been used to condone sin which I will talk about briefly in a bit.

Let me unpack this passage with a focus on the last verse. We who are in Christ are all adopted sons by grace through faith that has been given to us by God and all of us who have been saved by grace through faith are a part of one body. Then the last verse makes this even more clear. If this is you (saved by God adopted son or daughter through faith), then you are Abrahams offspring, heirs according to the promise. This is huge, church! Everyone who has been saved has been saved the same way and are offspring of Abraham through the promise that God made to Abraham. This promise was that God would save His true people through the offspring of Abraham namely Jesus. Church, there are not two peoples of God. There is not an Old Testament people of God and a New Testament people. As Galatians says, there is “neither Jew nor Greek,” this means in the universal Church, ethnicity does not divide us. No ethnicity or national group is more or less important.

All true believers are united, are ONE, in Christ Jesus. Paul could not make this any clearer than he does here. If you have been saved, you are part of one people by grace through faith in the only Savior: Jesus Christ.

The reason this last verse bears so much weight is that Paul jumps back to the promise of God to Abraham causing clarity about the salvation of those who lived and died before Jesus put on flesh. The clarity this verse brings is that if you are Christ’s, if you are saved by grace through faith, then you are Abraham’s spiritual offspring and the true heirs to the spiritual/eternal promise God made to Abraham. All the people God redeems unto salvation, in any generation throughout creation, are saved the same way and it does not have anything to do with ethnicity. The true birthright are those who trust in the promise God made to Abraham which is why we are offspring if we are believers!

The universal Church is one in how it was saved and one in whom it belongs to. There are not two peoples of God and there are not many ways to be saved by God. God’s people are not a single ethnicity; God’s people are the ones whom God saves from every tribe, tongue, and nation. God’s word says that if we believe, then we are offspring of Abraham because of the promise God made to save His people through Abraham’s offspring. The implications of this truth are innumerable!

If you are in Christ, if God has truly saved you, then you are part of one body and that body is called the universal Church.

As far as how these verses are misused, let me bring some clarity. I do not want to spend much time here, just enough to clear up some poor teaching by people in our current culture. Many today in the cultural sin of sexual identity will take these verses to support sinful practice. Let us be clear, if this verse were saying anything about sexual identity then it would contradict with the rest of scripture and would make God a liar. At this basic level, we can remove that idea. What about the God-given roles for men and women? Many would say that this verse means that as long as we are saved then the roles of man and woman are interchangeable since there is no male or female in Christ. Again, this is a really poor argument from a verse that is not speaking about roles in any manner. The same argument can be made that was made against sexual identity. If this were removing roles for men and women then it contradicts the very teachings of the author who has written it. The context of this verse is that God saves all His chosen people and your race or sex or social status has nothing to do with God’s sovereign choice. This does not nullify the God-given roles of men and women and it does not nullify the clear teaching of scripture on sexuality and God’s design for it. We must be careful not to use scriptures out of context to satisfy sinful desires.

Romans 12:2 ESV-Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

The problem plaguing many today (not that it is a new problem) is that some read this scripture backwards. By backwards I mean they read ideas into the scripture that are not taught in scripture. They look to the scriptures to change them so that the scriptures conform to their desires. Do you know how many times I have heard a student or loved one say this phrase “well, God is a God of love and he wants me to be happy so if this is what makes me happy then surely it is ok”? Then they take this view and go to the scriptures to make the scriptures agree with their sinful desire. They do this to free their conscience so that they can pursue their false god which is whatever sin they are trying to remove from God’s word.

If this is you, please listen to this. God is a God of love and He is after your supreme joy, your everlasting, eternity-filled, blood-bought joy if you belong to Him. Is there a chance that this thing ***you think*** would make you happy could end up letting you down? Have you ever been wrong before? Has God?

Jeremiah 17: 9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

The answer to the question Jeremiah poses in this passage is God; God is the one who understands the heart- not man. So instead of trusting your deceitful heart and changing God’s words so you can pursue something that leads to eternal consequences, trust the One who has never been wrong. Trust God, not yourself or the world around you. This is not the focus tonight, but my heart is breaking for those who claim to be Christian and yet pursue their idols as their false god and even deny the scriptures that so clearly condemn these things. In the end, this will prove who your god truly is and my fear is that many who are dear to me would be deceived by their own hearts.

Let us get back to the point on the universal Church.

Paul makes another very clear statement about all believers being a part of the same body in his letter to the Corinthians. This passage has practical implications that apply within the local church no doubt, but we’ll consider it mainly from the universal Church perspective. Let’s read it.

**1 Corinthians 12: 12** For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

13For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. 14For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. 21The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” 22On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, 24which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it,

25that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. 27Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

In God’s design for the universal church, He made it to function like a body. His sovereign design is to make each of us whom He has saved become a part of a global body that is meant to function together. Notice that no part of the body is to be considered lesser or unnecessary. When one member suffers, we all suffer together. When one is honored, we all rejoice together. We are the body though we are individual members of it.

There are two key points here. First, we belong to a bigger body of Christ and second, we are individual members. So, we have personal responsibility and global responsibility. Don’t miss this. This is a perfect lead way into my next point.

P: 2 The universal Church is made up of people from all around the world

**John 10:16** “And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”

This was the point Jesus was making in John 10. Remember, up until this time the Jews had, for the most part, believed that they were the only people that belonged to God. They still believed that God’s people were an ethnicity and Jesus is making clear here that He did not just come to save an ethnic group of people.

Rather, He came to save His sheep. Church, praise God for this! If the people of God were an ethnic group alone then it would be a safe bet to say all of us here would have no hope! How many of you are of Jewish descent? Some maybe, but praise God that He decided to save a people from every tribe, tongue and nation. This again was one of the things going on in our earlier Galatians passage. The church in Galatia had been told wrongly that they had to meet the ethnic rules of circumcision and have faith. This is why Paul says no, we are all (whether Jew or Gentile) saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Now I am driving this point home because the verses we are looking at are driving the same point.

We must see clearly that God’s people are not just an ethnic group; rather we are set apart as the body of Christ. Since the first person was redeemed unto salvation in the Old Testament, all the way until the final elect human is saved: we are one people. The universal Church is Christ’s body and together we are one from all over the world.

One of the biggest cultural wars that is going on right now is a war about ethnicity. About unethical treatment of people due to their skin color or ethnic background. I do believe a lot of this is driven by the country we have created, but we certainly do not have time tonight to dive into that.

Christians, if God has saved you (if you truly are a Christian then God must have saved you), then you have zero right to hate or condemn someone because of their ethnicity. If you are God’s and they are God’s, then God Himself has said you should be in a particularly grace-filled, loving relationship. If they are not part of God’s body, then you should love them also, as a neighbor; pray for them and share the gospel with them in hopes of bringing home a lost brother or sister.

Think about it. If someone somewhere along the way had stopped doing this, you and I would not have heard the gospel. Praise God that faithful believers throughout the centuries have prayed, labored, and loved those outside the body and inside the body or our generation would certainly be lost. By God’s design and power, they have done this and we will too.

**Matthew 28:18-20** And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

God has commanded us as He commanded the disciples to go and make disciples of all the nations. God’s design and command to bring the gospel to all of His elect all over the world is given to us here in this commandment from Jesus. We are to make disciples of all the nations. This is what has happened today for us who are alive 2,000 years after Jesus and live 7,400 miles from where He did His ministry. If faithful men and women of God had not obeyed through God’s power, we would not have the gospel here and now. This should well up in us a gratitude for those believers who were faithful and for God’s sovereignty to make certain that this would happen.

However, it cannot stop there! Our gratitude, our welling up of thankfulness must not end on us. It must drive the very feet of the body of Christ to continue moving so that we can be obedient to Jesus’ command to make disciples of all the nations.

This is a quote from the Joshua project: “It is estimated that of the 7.1 billion people alive in the world today, 2.91 billion of them live in unreached people groups with little or no access to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

2.91 billion people in the world have little or no access to the gospel. That is 2 billion nine hundred and ten million people. Or 90 million people from a total of 3 billion. It is estimated that there are 7.1 billion people alive so approximately **41%** of those people have little or no access to the gospel.

If this is accurate, we must be on mission to bring the gospel to people who are lost and hopeless without it. Do you know why Jesus has not returned yet?

There is a verse that is so often misused to claim that God desires everyone, every single person, to be saved and it is found in 2 Peter 3. I am going to read the chapter so that you can understand the context, and why it actually applies much more to our topic tonight, than to a desire from God that all people everywhere be saved.

(2 Peter 3:1-10 ESV)

 [1] This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, [2] that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, [3] knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. [4] They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” [5] For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God,

[6] and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. [7] But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

 [8] But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. [9] The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. [10] But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

In verse 9, the scripture reads that the Lord is not slow as some count slowness, but is patient toward ***you*** not willing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance. This is where some people take the verse out of its context and apply it incorrectly.

What is going on in this passage? How does this relate to the fact that there are people all over the world that are a part of the universal Church?

Do me a favor. If you have your Bibles, open them up to 2nd Peter 3 and follow along with me as I walk us quickly through these verses. Take notes where you need to or highlight as I am certain that this won’t be the only time this verse is brought up.

(2 Peter 3:1-10 ESV)

[1] This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, [2] that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles,

First look at WHO this passage is being written to, it is being written to the beloved. We know that this is an affectionate term used to describe believers or God’s beloved. This is written as a reminder to the beloved to remain steadfast and trust in the predictions of the prophets and the commands of the Lord and Savior. Well, why do they need to be reminded to trust in God and what has been taught to them through the Apostles? Verse [3] knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires.

There are a people called scoffers and they will scoff because they are following their own sinful desires. Well, what type of scoffing, what will they say?

Verse [4] They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.”

They will say, essentially, where is your God? The world is continuing the way it has since your ancestors have passed, and it will continue on in the same way. Your God is not returning because He is not real, or does not care, or whatever else a scoffer may say. Peter goes on [5] For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, [6] and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. [7] But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

They deliberately overlook the fact that God has created all things, has destroyed the earth with water (so to speak) once already, and that it is being stored up for fire, kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. Peter says be encouraged. Don’t be fooled. These scoffers are in sin and dead and though they know God, as Romans 1 says, by their unrighteousness they suppress this truth.

Peter continues in his encouragement to the beloved: [8] But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. [9] The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Beloved, even if scoffers mock and declare that our Lord will not return, if they argue that there has been too much time and He can’t exist or He isn’t coming back, remember this **fact**! The Lord’s timing is not our timing. One day a thousand years and a thousand years one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise. Do not be deceived by scoffers! **Here is the climax. Here is the point.** But He is patient toward you (you who? You the beloved!) not wishing that any (any who? Any of His beloved!) should perish but that all (all who? All the beloved!) should reach repentance.

Church, God has not returned yet because He is not done saving His beloved- these are the elect as we’ve learned in our previous studies. Just think about it, how crummy is a movie that ends before the hero saves who he intends to save!? This is not a movie. This is real life. Almost half of the world’s population does not have the gospel! If you have ever cried come, Lord Jesus, come quickly, then what are you doing to reach these God’s beloved?!

Do you see how this misused verse is not talking about God wanting to save everyone but rather that he will not return (He is exercising great patience waiting for us to fulfill the work He has commanded) until He has saved all of (the elect) His beloved. This is AMAZING. God will return one day, but this is what the scriptures say, He hasn’t come back yet because He has promised that not one of His sheep will be lost.

**Matthew 24:31** “And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

See the certainty of the scriptures. God **will** collect His chosen people **and** they will be all over the world! When Jesus returns, He will return to gather His people (AMEN) and His people will be all over the world (AMEN). If this were not true, then we would be hopeless.

Church, do not lose heart. Remember, our God keeps His promises and if He does not return in our lifetime, remember the reason given; He is not done saving His people yet.

P: 3 It is all who are called out of darkness, regenerated, and set apart by God’s saving grace. All the genuine believers in Jesus.

We use a lot of words to describe believers. As a believer, we have been called out of darkness:

**1 Peter 2:9-10** But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

There is some really cool language in this passage. We are a chosen race. The saved are one people. We are the adopted children of God. That is amazing. We are a royal priesthood. The priests in the old covenant were the only ones allowed to enter the presence of God, but we have the very Spirit of God dwelling within us. We cannot be out of the presence of God. We are a holy nation. God has made a new people of different tribes and tongues and nations and we are one. We are one nation united in Jesus and we are set apart! We have been made holy and will be made holy eternally and totally one day. That is a beautiful part of being in the universal Church.

We are a people for His own possession; you do not belong to yourself. You were bought with a price and God owns you.

We are His possession and there is no better Lord to possess you. Listen, how bad do things go when we act like we own our lives and we are Lord? Rather again, be thankful to God that He owns us because He is a good, loving, just God who rules us way more beautifully than we could ever lead ourselves. Left to ourselves, we would ruin us. Left to ourselves, we have ruined us.

I have said this many times- no one has lied to you more than you have. No one has hurt you more than you have! God did this so we could proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. You were saved from the darkness you lived in if God has given you faith; you were saved from eternal outer darkness where there will be gnashing of teeth and torment forever if God has given you faith. If you have been saved, you are part of a global body of Christians that share in this reality and the earth should shake with our praise to God for what He has done.

The passage goes on to say that once you were not a people, but (one of those beautiful buts in the Bible!) now you are God’s people. Just pause for a second and take that in. What does God mean once we were not a people? I have brothers and sisters true blood-bought family who were not my family at one time. I have family now closer to me in our church than those who share my blood!

Does that make sense? We believers come from all sorts of peoples and we were not a people at one point, but now through God’s grace and love, through his adoption, I am a people with those whom I was at one point not a people with.

The passage ends with “once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

The blood-purchased people of God have received mercy! We are God’s possession and God says that is because of His mercy. I cannot think about this enough. I am not my own. I belong to God and I am a slave to God because God has been merciful to me. To give me up to my desires to leave me in the dark when I thought I was the Lord of my life- that would be God’s just wrath. Instead, I have received mercy.

Perhaps even more incredible than this is the fact that we are an intimate people of God. We are not just the robots God saved to show off His power. No, He makes us the bride of Christ and this language is used to show the intimacy of the relationship between God and His chosen people.

**John 3:29** “The one who has the bride is the bridegroom...”

**Ephesians 5:25** ...Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

Jesus gave up His life for His bride. He is the bridegroom we, the true believers, are the bride. We are the bride because Jesus gave His life to make us His bride. The work Jesus did was effective. Jesus will save all His chosen people. He is the perfect bridegroom and He came to lay His life down for His bride. The bride of Christ is the universal Church.

For clarity’s sake let me explain something, and note that Rob will expand on this in his lesson on the local church in a few weeks, so I’m just making a quick point for clarity in the meantime. There are people who belong to a local body and profess to be believers but they are not truly believers and since they have not yet been truly saved they are not a part of the universal Church.

There are also many people who attend local churches who are not genuine believers and do not profess to be. They are not a part of the universal Church just because they attend services at a local body. They may become a part of the universal Church someday if it is God’s will to save them. However, until that day, they are not a part of the universal Church.

Why is it important to understand these things about the universal Church? The scriptures have many commands for how we are to interact with the true body of believers. In order to be in line with God’s word, we need to understand who His word is being applied to.

How many of you have had this experience: you were having a bad day, things were going way wrong and you were unkind to someone? Later you find out that the someone whom you were unkind to is very important like your new boss or your best friend’s new girlfriend or your future father-in-law, etc…

How often has this happened with Jesus’ bride? I am guilty of this. I am not the most social person. I have been short with someone (mostly out of my own insecurities) until I realized they were a brother or a sister and then I felt really stupid for how I had been treating them.

If we fellow believers are all a part of one body in Christ and called His bride, then it follows that we must treat each other with the same respect you would treat God’s very bride. Do you see the implications?

Application:

If the universal church is the one body of all believers who have been saved, then we who are a part of that body need to know how to do life in light of this truth.

Here is an obvious one: there is zero room within the universal church for racism of any kind. You and I who are true believers have been made into one person with every ethnicity that exists. The gospel removes this and because of the gospel we have even higher standards against this foolishness.

What about missions? If we have future brothers and sisters all across the globe, we must be on mission. We must be the hands and feet of God moving throughout our world to share the gospel so that those who are still in darkness may be moved to light by God’s grace.

If our command has been to go and make disciples of all nations, then we must be going to all nations. Let me be clear, not everyone has to go to a foreign country, but we definitely need people to be going. You must either be a person who is going or supporting, in some manner, those who are going. We are called to be on mission.

If you are not someone who is going out you must be making disciples here. Your mission has not changed. If you are here, you should be making disciples, baptizing believers, and teaching them all that God has taught us through the scriptures!

Remember we should pray for all believers. We should rejoice with them when things go well. We should mourn with them when things go bad. We are all part of one body in Jesus!

Let’s pray.