

Romans

Romans Chapter Eleven

Romans 11:16-24

May 15, 2011

This is lesson number **89** in our exposition of the Book of Romans.

The Theme of the Letter

“For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ**, for it is the **power** of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the **righteousness of God is revealed** from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’ ” Romans 1:16-17

Title: The Single Olive Tree

Chapter 11 opens with the question, “Has God cast away His people?”

Paul explains how God has not at all cast away His people.

The Jewish religious world in Paul’s day believed that God’s people were the Jews. Even so in our day most preachers and Bible scholars believe God’s people are the Jews.

But Paul clearly defines God’s people as those whom He **foreknew** [11:2].

Those people whom God foreknew are the remnant according to the election of grace of which Paul and Elijah and the 7000 men God had reserved for Himself are examples. And so God has not cast away His people because Paul himself is one of the called of God! [11:1-7]

Isaiah had warned that God would harden national Israel because of their unbelief and idolatry. David had prophesied a similar warning.

Now Paul interprets these OT prophecies as having been fulfilled in the final rejection of the nation of Israel. [11:8-10]

But the fall of national Israel had a greater purpose beyond the fact that they as a nation were rejected by God. God brings good out of evil as Paul is called to be the apostle to the Gentiles. Saul of Tarsus was an evil man. Paul the Apostle was used by God to bring about much good. Through the ministry of Paul great numbers of Gentiles are called through the Gospel.

“I magnify my ministry,” says Paul in 11:13.

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God has always included Gentiles in the election of grace and the OT gives us examples such as Rahab the Harlot and Ruth the Moabite both of whom are in the lineage of Jesus as to His human nature.

After establishing how God has not cast away His people Paul says that because of his example that perhaps some of his brethren according to the flesh, those for whom he is in genuine sorrow, and for whom he grieves, and for whom he earnestly prays that some of them might be saved. Elect Jews from among the nation of Jews are being saved as individuals and that says Paul, is “life from the dead.” [11-15]

Now for this lesson on verses 16-24, Paul continues his explanation of how God has brought Gentiles and Jews together into **one body**. He gives us a parable of the **cultivated olive tree** to show how the makeup or the constitution of the church includes both Gentiles and Jews in one body.

“For I do not desire, brethren, that you to be ignorant of this mystery...” [11:25]

That which before was a mystery, is now clearly seen.

The mystery is not that there would be the church but rather the makeup of the church, Gentiles and Jews together in one body.

To explain this mystery this Paul uses a parable of

“The Single Olive Tree.”

Frankly I had not appreciated the depth and strength of this parable until I became aware of the significance of a correct understanding of who makes up “all Israel” in 11:26. “**And so all Israel will be saved.**”

So let’s consider the parable of the cultivated olive tree.

Romans 11:16-24

16 For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. 17 And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, 18 do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.

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19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." **20** Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. **21** For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. **22** Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. **23** And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. **24** For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

As with any parable in the Bible we must be careful not to base our doctrine on the parable or illustration itself. Yet in the image of the cultivated olive tree there is much to support what is clearly taught in other Scriptures, viz. the unity of the body.

That is what Paul's letter to the Ephesians is about – unity of the body, Gentiles and Jews together – the middle wall of partition has been broken down!

In this lesson we will answer four questions:

What does this olive tree illustrate?

What or who are the branches that are removed from the olive tree and what or who are the branches that are grafted into the olive tree?

What is the nature of the branches in each case?

What about the eternal security of the believer?

First, What does this olive tree illustrate?

We are told that is a **holy** thing.

The word "holy" refers to something or to someone that God has set apart, or sanctified for His use.

The utensils used in the tabernacle and in the temple to worship God are said to be "holy". Bronze, inanimate, lifeless utensils are said to be "holy" because they are set aside for the worship of God.

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Christ Himself is sanctified, i.e., set apart, Jesus prayed, “I sanctify Myself.”

The Sabbath is holy. Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy.

And sister and brother, if you are a Christian, you too are holy.

“Sanctify them by Your truth,” Jesus said. The Word of God sets the believer apart for God’s use. Sanctified and holy.

You are looking at a “saint” who is himself looking at some “saints.”

The “**firstfruit**” in this illustration comes from Leviticus and Numbers where a loaf of bread was made from the firstfruit of the grain and was used as a wave offering to God.

Leviticus 23:9-11

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 10 “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest.”

The lesson being taught by this act of worship was that when you dedicate the firstfruit of your crop to God then the entire harvest belongs to God.

You are not your own, you were bought with a price.

So the entire cultivated olive tree is holy.

Whatever or whomever are in the cultivated olive tree are holy because they derive their life from the root and fatness of the olive tree.

The unholy branches have been broken off.

But that doesn’t completely answer the question:

What does this olive tree illustrate?

Some say the olive tree is ethnic Israel.

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Israel is referred to as the olive tree in the OT. Listen to:

Jeremiah 11:14-16

14 "So do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them; for I will not hear them in the time that they cry out to Me because of their trouble.

15 "What has My beloved to do in My house, Having done lewd deeds with many? And the holy flesh has passed from you. When you do evil, then you rejoice. 16 The LORD called your name, Green Olive Tree, Lovely and of Good Fruit. With the noise of a great tumult He has kindled fire on it, And its branches are broken.

Now that Scripture certainly refers to ethnic Israel as an olive tree and Jeremiah even says its branches are broken. But notice that Jeremiah is talking about branches that are broken. True Israel remains as the remnant and the unbelieving branches are broken off.

The context of Chapter 11 and the rest of the Bible says that the cultivated olive tree in this parable is true Israel.

This olive tree stands for the total number of the saved, or **salvation** itself.

Every branch in this cultivated olive tree is holy and they stand by faith alone.

Back in Chapter 4 Paul works out justification by faith and Paul uses Abraham as the example. God justifies the ungodly. He calls Abraham, an idolater, out of Ur of the Chaldeans and speaks to him.

Abraham believed God and his faith was counted to him as righteousness. Abraham, we are told in Galatians, believed the Gospel.

So the root and the fatness of the cultivated olive tree is **justification by faith**.

Anyone who believes the Gospel, both Gentile and Jew is receiving his or her life from the sap of the single olive tree.

So the cultivated olive tree is salvation or the total number of the saved and these are "all Israel" in 11:26.

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The next question is: **What or who are the branches that are broken off from olive tree and what or who are the branches that are grafted into the olive tree?**

The fall and ruin of the nation of Israel in A.D. 70 does not mean then that no Jews can be saved.

That is Paul's point in using himself as proof that God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. I am a Jew, says Paul, and many more Jews will be saved as God calls them through the Gospel.

Anyone who repents and believes the Gospel of the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ will call on the name of the Lord and will be saved.

Verse 17 confirms that not all of earthly Israel was cast away, only the unbelievers. "Some of the branches" are individuals.

Throughout this section of Chapters 9, 10, and 11 it is individuals that are saved and individuals that are lost. When it comes to justification and salvation God deals with individuals and never with nations or races of people.

So the root and fatness of the cultivated olive tree is justification by faith. Those Jews who abide in unbelief are broken off.

But there are other individuals who are grafted into the olive tree.

There are "wild branches" that are grafted into the cultivated olive tree.

These "wild branches" are Gentiles who once were separated from the commonwealth of Israel but are now grafted into the cultivated olive tree and are as much a part of the tree as those "natural" branches.

In my study of this text I read a lot of material about the art of grafting and while it is not the usual procedure to graft a wild branch into a cultivated tree, it was done in Palestine.

A tree that had lost its vitality receives a wild branch which gets its life from the root of the tree and the tree produces fruit again. But the illustration of the cultivated olive tree is not given to teach us the techniques of horticulture.

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**What we are given is the key to the mystery of the church:
Gentiles and Jews in one body forever.**

I make no apology for reminding you of Acts 15.

The Jerusalem Council was called to settle forever the question of Gentiles coming into the church. This was a watershed event in the early history of the church. Does a Gentile have to be circumcised in order to become a Christian; Does a Gentile have to become a Jew in order to become a Christian?

I truly believe that if preachers and Bible scholars who make a distinction between national Israel and the church could ever get this one Scripture correctly understood in their minds that it would, perhaps, persuade them of the truth of the mystery of the church.

Acts 15:1-18

And certain *men* came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." ² Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.

³ So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. ⁴ And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. ⁵ But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses."

⁶ Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. ⁷ And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

⁸ So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, ⁹ and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? ¹¹ But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."

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12 Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles. 13 And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me: 14 Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. 15 And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:

Please pay attention to what James is doing here. He is taking an OT prophecy and explaining how it is fulfilled in the church. Our Dispensational friends say that this prophecy is about a literal temple to be rebuilt when Israel is restored. James says it is fulfilled in the church!

**16 'After! this I will return
And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down;
I will rebuild its ruins,
And I will set it up;
17 So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD,
Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name,
Says the LORD who does all these things.'
18 "Known to God from eternity are all His works.**

Please see that James is quoting Amos and says the correct interpretation of the rebuilding of the temple is not some future restoration of the nation of Israel but it is the church made up of Gentiles and Jews together in one body. There is one Gospel and one way to be saved.

"Known to God from eternity are all His works.

Be sure you understand a very important point here.

The church did not **replace** national Israel as the people of God because national Israel **never was** the people of God.

Romans 9:6-9

But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, 7 nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." 8 That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.

So this parable of the cultivated olive tree is salvation in Christ and the branches are the remnant of believing Jews and Gentiles, all of whom are called by God through the Gospel.

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The third question is: **What is the nature of the branches in each case?**

Paul defined the nature of the branches in Chapter 8.

This is the best definition of a Christian and an unbeliever to be found in the entire Bible.

Romans 8:5-8

5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. 7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. 8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Unbelievers live their lives according to their sinful nature and believers are led by the Holy Spirit.

There is a warning here to Gentile believers that they should be very careful not to assume an arrogant attitude toward their fellow believers who are Jewish. Gentile believer you get your life from the root and fatness of the olive tree which is based in correct OT Judaism.

Paul gave the same warning to the Gentiles in Corinth.

1 Corinthians 4:6-7

Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. 7 For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

Paul writes about the **goodness** and the **severity** of God in verse 22.

Many preachers emphasize the **goodness** of God and you really cannot say too much about the goodness of God.

What we saw in Chapter 9 is that it is only through the mercy of God that anyone is saved. No one deserves to be saved. If God has shown you mercy all you can do is say:

“Thank you Lord for saving my soul. Thank you Lord for making me whole.
Thank you Lord for giving to me Your great salvation so rich and so free.”

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But far too many preachers will not preach about the **wrath** of God. They are afraid they might offend someone and besides you cannot build a mega church by telling people they are sinners. But until you are convinced that you are a guilty sinner and that you deserve to go to hell under the severity of God's holy wrath you cannot be saved.

Let me add something. There is no doubt in my mind that God saves very young children and sometimes people who have not lived the profligate life. Yet, when these people are confronted with the wrath of God they readily agree that they too were justly condemned.

It is my belief that the wrath of God is a necessary component of the Gospel. Many times in this exposition of Romans I have reminded you of the unbreakable link that Paul makes between the Gospel and the wrath of God in Romans 1.

The goodness of God is that He saves sinners.

The severity of God is that He sends unbelievers and hypocrites to hell.

Those in hell have no way out. No matter how much money their family pays to a false church and no matter how many 'baptisms for the dead' there is no escape from eternal damnation.

Hebrews 9:27

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,

So there is the cultivated olive tree, which is salvation, and there are natural branches broken off [Jews] and wild branches grafted in [Gentiles]. There we have the nature of the unbeliever and the nature of the believer.

The fourth question is: **What about the eternal security of the believer?**

There are those who teach that a person can be saved and yet finally be lost.

At least they are consistent in their theology because they also teach that God saves a person based on what a person does. If their works can save a person then it is consistent that they can lose their salvation through their actions.

But if God does the saving it is forever.

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It comes down to whether a person is “in Christ” or not. John 10:22-30

John 10:22-30

²² Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. ²³ And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch. ²⁴ Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly."

²⁵ Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. ²⁶ But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. ²⁷ My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. ²⁸ And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand. ³⁰ I and My Father are one."

The warning here in this passage and in the Book of Hebrews and in other places is that a genuine believer will not become careless about his or her salvation.

If you believe that you are saved but that you can continue to live the same way as an unsaved person then you are denying the grace of God and the power of God the Holy Spirit.

The apostle has told us in 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Are you “in Christ Jesus?” What evidence do you have to believe that?

Does the Spirit bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?

Were you a guilty sinner? Can you agree with the severity of God?

Do you trust entirely and only the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus?

Let me close with a few comments on this remarkable passage of Scripture.

- There is only one cultivated olive tree and it is the true church.
- The church is a living organism and it is not an organization.

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By that I mean the true church or the Israel of God is a living organism, a cultivated olive tree, and it is not limited to any visible organization or church, even Vineland Park Baptist Church.

- The notion that God recognizes two objects on which He bestows His everlasting, saving love, namely the Jews and the church as separate entities is contrary to Scripture.
- Do not think that as a Gentile believer that you are in any way superior to a believing Jew. There is no place for racial bigotry in the heart of a Christian.

I will end this lesson by reading without comment some passages from Romans that we have already discussed.

Romans 3:27-31

Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. 28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. 29 Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, 30 since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. 31 Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

Romans 4:11-12

11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, 12 and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.

Romans 4:16-17

16 Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all 17(as it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations")

Romans 5:18-19

18 Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.

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Romans 9:22-24

22 What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, **23** and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, **24** even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

Romans 10:12-13

12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. **13** For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

Our text for today:

Romans 11:16-24

16 For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. **17** And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, **18** do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.

19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." **20** Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. **21** For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. **22** Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. **23** And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. **24** For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

There is nothing in this passage about a future restoration of the nation of Israel. Paul is addressing the situation at the "present time" for Paul and yes this situation continues in our day and will continue until the end of the age.

God is saving individual Gentiles and individual Jews and has never justified nations of people Gentile or Jew.

Remember this: **ONE OLIVE TREE!**