

BELIEF IS ALWAYS THE BOTTOM LINE

If I were to ask you to remember what might be the single most important thing that you took away from last week's message, I wonder what your response might be? My response would be:

If you place anything above God in importance in your life, you are not saved. You must believe that God is in charge and allow Him to be in charge.

If you didn't remember that from last week, I hope you'll burn it into the DVD of your mind because it is essential to where you will be spending your eternity. I also hope that you remember **THERE IS NO WAY ANYONE CAN EARN SALVATION BY THEIR GOOD WORKS**. You could be the best person that ever lived on this planet and you'd still fall short of God's standard of sinless behavior. The only way to salvation and eternal life is through faith and trust in the work of Christ on the cross. That's what God wanted the Jews of the first century to understand and that's what He has wanted everyone to understand since that time.

Just one quick vocabulary note here so that everyone understands the term, "*Gentile*," because we'll be using the word repeatedly this morning. Gentile or Gentiles refers to all of the other people in the world who aren't Jewish.

Also if you're joining us for the first time this morning, a little way past the mid-point in our study of the book of Romans, you might initially wonder what all this talk is about Jews and Gentiles almost two thousand years ago. How could this stuff apply to our lives today? Well, if you listen carefully, you'll be able in this one message to see clearly the broad scope of God's plan for humankind from the beginning to the end. We would encourage anyone having a question to ask it. Please don't leave here this morning without a clear understanding of how you fit into God's plan.

Let's now review the first ten verses of chapter eleven and then we'll move on with today's lesson. Romans 11:1-10:

1 I ask, then, has God rejected his people, the Jews? Of course not!

Remember that I (Paul) myself am a Jew, a descendant of Abraham and a member of the tribe of Benjamin.

*2 No, **God has not rejected his own people**, whom he chose from the very beginning. Do you remember what the Scriptures say about this? Elijah the prophet complained to God about the people of Israel and said,*

3 "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars. I alone

am left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.”

*4 And do you remember God’s reply? He said, “**You are not the only one left. I have seven thousand others who have never bowed down to Baal!**”*

*5 It is the same today, for **not all the Jews have turned away from God.***

A few are being saved as a result of God’s kindness in choosing them.

*6 **And if they are saved by God’s kindness, then it is not by their good works.** For in that case, God’s wonderful kindness would not be what it really is—free and undeserved.*

*7 So this is the situation: Most of the Jews have not found the favor of God **they are looking for** so earnestly. A few have—the ones God has chosen (those who have believed in Jesus¹)—but the rest were made unresponsive.*

8 As the Scriptures say, “God has put them into a deep sleep. To this very day he has shut their eyes so they do not see, and closed their ears so they do not hear.”

9 David spoke of this same thing when he said, “Let their bountiful table become a snare, a trap that makes them think all is well. Let their blessings cause them to stumble.

10 Let their eyes go blind so they cannot see, and let their backs grow weaker and weaker.”

If you weren’t here last week, I’d suggest you check out the message on our web site for a further explanation of these ten verses.

Do you love a good mystery? Are you held spell bound by *Law and Order*, *Perry Mason*, or *Sherlock Holmes*? Today, as we continue in Romans 11, we’ll be looking at a wonderful mystery, one that far surpasses any of those just mentioned. It is a mystery involving a truth that was in the Scriptures for hundreds of years but which only came to light after Christ’s death and resurrection. It is a mystery that is now being revealed by Paul. Lets begin by reading Romans 11:11-15:

*11 So I ask, have they (Israel²) stumbled so as to fall? By no means! But **through their stumbling salvation has come to the Gentiles**, so as to make Israel jealous.*

*12 Now if the Gentiles were enriched because the Jews turned down God’s offer of salvation, think **how much greater a blessing the world will share when the Jews finally accept it.***

13 I am saying all of this especially for you Gentiles. God has appointed me as the apostle to the Gentiles. I lay great stress on this,

*14 for **I want to find a way to make the Jews want what you Gentiles have**, and in that way I might save some of them.*

*15 For since the Jews’ rejection meant that God offered salvation to the rest of the world, **how much more wonderful their acceptance will be. It will be life for those who were dead!***

¹ Parentheses added.

² Ibid.

God intends to use Israel's stumbling (Romans 11:9,11), her disbelief in Jesus as the Messiah and Savior, for a purpose. I believe that purpose is made very clear in Ephesians 3:4-7:

*4 As you read what I have written, you will understand what I know about this **mystery regarding Christ.***

*5 God did not reveal it to previous generations, but **now** he has revealed it by the Holy Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets.*

6 And this is the secret plan: THE GENTILES HAVE AN EQUAL SHARE WITH THE JEWS IN ALL THE RICHES INHERITED BY GOD'S CHILDREN. Both groups have believed the Good News, and both are part of the same body and enjoy together the promise of blessings through Christ Jesus.

7 By God's special favor and mighty power, I have been given the wonderful privilege of serving him by spreading this Good News.

The "mystery" was, that God always intended salvation to come to the Gentiles. His plan was for it to come through the Jews. He gave the Jews the Scriptures and Christ. They COULD HAVE BEEN the messengers for the Word of God to be presented to all nations (Gentiles), in which case both Jews and Gentiles would have received salvation.

However, the Jews became puffed up over their special status of being God's people. They interpreted that call by God as meaning they were the **only ones** who could be saved, rather than as meaning they were the chosen people **through which** God's Word would be given to the world. They distorted and disobeyed the Scriptures and rejected Christ, so God would now offer salvation to those who would believe.

Israel's fall is not a fall beyond recovery. In fact God will use Israel's fall, first to benefit Gentiles with greater blessings than they would ever have received if Israel had not fallen, and then to experience blessing themselves. The sequence of how this will occur is explained by Paul. First, already through Israel's fall salvation has come to the Gentiles. Secondly, this Gentile salvation will make Israel envious and so lead to her salvation, her restoration or "fullness." Thirdly, Israel's fullness will bring much greater riches to the world.

Thus the blessing ricochets from Israel to the Gentiles, from the Gentiles back to Israel, and from Israel to the Gentiles again. Of these three stages the first has already taken place; the second and third stages will come in the future. Luke records four separate occasions in the book of Acts where the rejection of the Gospel by the Jews led to its acceptance by the Gentiles: Acts 13:44-52; Acts 18:1-6; Acts 19:1-10; Acts 28:11-31. The Jews rejected the Gospel message and the Gentiles accepted it. Paul goes on to say in verse 12 that the first event took place with a view to the second. God thus used the disobedience and sin of Israel so that the Gentiles could be saved.

And then Paul tells us that salvation was given to the Gentiles in order to make Israel jealous. If you read the verses just mentioned in the book of Acts, you'll see several references indicating jealousy by the Jews toward the apostles. The Jews were jealous of the apostles' success, of their influence on the people, and of the large crowds they attracted. But Paul foresees an even more productive envy than this. Paul knows that when Israel sees the blessings of salvation being enjoyed by believing Gentiles, their reconciliation to one another and to God, their forgiveness, their love, joy, and peace through the Spirit, the Jews will want these blessings for themselves and, it is implied, they will repent and believe in Jesus in order to have them. Thus provoked to envy, the Jews will be led to belief and conversion.

This future conversion of Israel will then lead to a further blessing for the whole world. We need to be careful not to gloss over verses 11 and 12 because they are very meaningful. Why? Well, let's take a closer look at them. If Israel's "*fall*" and "*defeat*" brought blessing to the Gentiles, in other words if something bad happening to Israel brought a great blessing to the rest of the world, just think how much blessing the rest of the world will get when the greatest majority of the Jews are converted and believe in Christ. The blessing for the rest of the world should then be even much greater.

Now the **envy** that Paul is trying to create among the Jews **is not necessarily a bad thing** because envy can be evaluated by the nature of the thing desired. If the something we want belongs to someone else and we have no right to it, then envy is evil. But if the thing desired is in and of itself good, something that God wants for all people, then to desire such a thing is not bad. Such a desire is a right thing in itself and a good thing to want to have.

Something else we should take note of here is that it is a well-known fact that anti-Semitism has been a major prejudice in our world probably from the very first century until now. Anti-Semitism of course is a hatred for the Jews. The other side of that, however, is that many of the Jews have hated Gentiles, which is probably a lesser known fact, but true. Now one of the big problems for the Jews in Paul's day was their arrogance. They simply refused to humble themselves before their God. So God allows them to stumble and they have to endure the conversion and acceptance of Gentiles whom they must become jealous of before they can come back to their God. This is a very humbling thing for the Jews. God has therefore taken action that will force Israel to become humble in that they will now seek a faith that they want because they see all the blessings it brings to the Gentiles.

And this should be a lesson to those of us who are already saved, that we not become proud and arrogant. Because it is only as a result of the grace of God that we have this gift of salvation. Our lives should therefore be powerful, joyful, peaceful, hopeful testimonies of what God can do in a life so that our lives would be attractive to Jews who have rejected the Savior. How we live, act, speak, and make evident the love of Jesus to the Jews is the single greatest testimony we can have for the Jewish people.

At this point I want to tell you a story that I hope will stick with you and become part of

you. This specific instance relates to the Jewish people in Israel, but the lesson can apply to almost anyone anywhere. If you ever take a trip to Israel, you'll probably find that the tour guides who have been around for a number of years are more than just a little familiar with Christianity because of all the Christian tourists that visit Israel. These guides know all the hymns, they know the doctrine, they even know more than you would think about New Testament theology.

Here is what one guide told a Christian pastor who spent some time speaking with him one evening. He said, "*Look, I know what all of you believe. What I can't handle is the way most of you live your lives.*" He went on to tell this pastor horror stories about the so-called Christian leaders who visit there and don't sleep with their own wives. Others want under the table favors, free jewelry, free lodging, free meals, and whatever else they can get free. They're nothing more than hypocrites. These people call themselves Christians whether they are or not and it creates confusion in the minds of the Israelis about the validity of Christianity.

Christians, who perhaps aren't aware of the great responsibility they've been given, had better wake up and smell the coffee. We need to realize that God will hold us responsible for giving a clear-cut testimony to Israel, so that such testimony will make them envious of what we have. Unfortunately and tragically what we have is the last thing they would want based on what they see in the behavior of many Christians.

You'll recall back in Romans 10:19 Paul wrote:

19 But did the people of Israel really understand? Yes, they did, for even in the time of Moses, God had said, "I will rouse your jealousy by blessing other nations. I will make you angry by blessing the foolish Gentiles."

And Moses told the people of Israel this would happen way back in Deuteronomy 32 around 1500 B.C.

Further, Paul regards arousing the Jews to envy what the Gentiles have as an integral part of his mission to the Gentiles. In his letter to the Romans thus far, Paul, who has been appointed as the apostle to the Gentiles, has had an awful lot to say about the Jews. **So Paul wants to demonstrate that the Jews and Gentiles can't really be separated.** Paul wants to show the Gentiles how his intent of arousing the Jews to envy will have a directly beneficial effect upon them.

What are these great riches which the fullness of Israel will bring to the Gentiles? The greater riches for the Gentiles will be "*life for those who are dead* (verse 15)." There are a few different interpretations of this phrase and we would not discount any of them. But I believe the best explanation which fits into the context of everything Paul is referring to in these verses would be that the Church, that is all believing Christians, are to have respect for the Jews and to desire their conversion, for them to be grafted back into the tree. This is implied by the advantages that would accrue to the Church by the conversion of the Jews (Romans 11:12,15). It would be "*as life from the dead*", and isn't that how a

conversion experience is described? Based on Christ's resurrection, those of us who were once "*dead in trespasses and sins*" are now made alive through our faith in Christ. Those of us who were on the way to Hell because of our sins can now rejoice that we are alive and on our way to Heaven because Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. We who were spiritually dead are now spiritually alive because we've been made a part of that tree that is fed through its roots by the holiness of Jesus Christ. Therefore, those of us who through our faith in Christ have been grafted into the tree, must not insult and gloat over those poor Jews who were cut off because of their disbelief, but rather pity them, and desire their welfare, and long for them to come to faith in Christ so that they may be grafted in again.³

Then beginning in verse 16 (Romans 11:16), Paul makes an analogy that should not be skimmed over lightly. He likens the root of the olive tree to be holy. This means that God granted righteousness to Abraham and the patriarchs because of their faith. Therefore, those who became branches of that tree whose root was holy, because of their faith, will be holy as well, Romans 11:16:

16 And since Abraham and the other patriarchs were holy, their children will also be holy. For if the roots of the tree are holy, the branches will be, too.

Beginning in verse 17, Paul issues a warning to the Gentiles regarding pride, Romans 11:17-20:

*17 But some of these branches from Abraham's tree, **some of the Jews, have been broken off.** And you **Gentiles**, who were branches from a WILD OLIVE TREE, were grafted in. So now you also receive the blessing God has promised Abraham and his children, sharing in God's rich nourishment of his special olive tree.*

*18 But you **must be careful not to brag** about being grafted in to replace the branches that were broken off. Remember, **you are just a branch, not the root.***

19 "Well," you may say, "those branches were broken off to make room for me."

*20 Yes, but remember—those branches, the Jews, were broken off because they didn't believe God, and you are there because you do believe. **Don't think highly of yourself, but fear what could happen.***

Paul is telling the Gentiles here not to think that they're superior to the Jews because the Jews' branches have been broken off. Paul warns them not to think that way because in verse 21 he says:

21 For if God did not spare the branches he put there in the first place, he

³ Henry, M. 1996, c1991. Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible : Complete and unabridged in one volume . Hendrickson: Peabody

won't spare you either.

If we go back to verse 16 we see here where Paul refers to the **first fruits of dough** and **the whole lump; the root** and **the branches**. The first fruits of dough and the root refer to Abraham and the other patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob. The whole lump and the branches refer to God's people Israel, who are descendants of the patriarchs. The holiness attributed to the part and the whole, the root and the branches, is that of being dedicated, consecrated, set apart to God. This is a legal holiness for the **group** by virtue of their being God's chosen people.

It is important to keep in mind as we study these passages that Paul is not referring to individuals, but to Jews and Gentiles as people groups. We mention this so that no one will get the idea that you can lose your salvation. Verses such as Romans 11:21 are referring to groups of people. For example, when I say, "Americans love pizza," you know I mean Americans in general, not every American. So when Paul refers to Israel, He is referring to the nation as a group of people, not necessarily every single Jew.

Then Paul proceeds in verse 17 to compare Israel to an olive tree. He says that some of the branches have been broken off, but not all of them because there always was and always will be a remnant of Jewish believers. This analogy Paul makes is representative of what actually happens in the agricultural care of olive trees, which was a major crop in Israel. A branch that was unproductive would have to be broken off because it would still sap some of the strength from the tree and it would crowd the tree so that air and sunlight couldn't penetrate the grafted branch which needed all the air and sunlight it could get. So the unproductive branches would be cut off. And they would then graft in the new branches which would then benefit and thrive from being fed by the roots and trunk of the olive tree. That's what we're being told in verse 17:

*17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place **to share the rich root of the olive tree.***

Because God offered salvation to the Gentiles as well as the Jews, the Gentile believers have also become a people of blessing. They too are now spiritual children of Abraham and the Jewish patriarchs. Gentile believers now share in the promises God made to the Jews. They too can now partake of the blessings that flow through the root of the tree that is fed by the holiness of Jesus Christ.

We can't leave this thought without reading from John 15:1ff (NRSV):

- 1 ***"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.***
- 2 *"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.*
- 4 *"Abide in Me, and I in you. As **the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.***
- 5 ***"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in***

*him, he bears much fruit, for **apart from Me you can do nothing.***

9 “Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.

11 “THESE THINGS I HAVE SPOKEN TO YOU SO THAT MY JOY MAY BE IN YOU, AND THAT YOUR JOY MAY BE MADE FULL.

Do you remember what Jesus said in Matthew 22:8-10:

*8 And he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, and **the guests I invited aren’t worthy** of the honor.*

*9 Now **go out to the street corners and invite everyone you see.**’*

10 “So the servants brought in everyone they could find, good and bad alike, and the banquet hall was filled with guests.

The Jews didn’t want it, so it was given to the Gentiles. So that is when the Gentiles were grafted in to the olive tree. Paul goes on to give a command in verse 18:

*18 **But you must be careful not to brag** about being grafted in to replace the branches that were broken off. Remember, you are just a branch, not the root.*

Don’t start boasting that you are better than the branches that were cut out. Because it is the root that is providing for you, and the root is the patriarchs of Israel: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to whom God made His promises. And it is through the root of Jesse, Jesus Christ, that the promises could be kept. It is because of this root that every believer has received salvation and no tree can exist without a root. If you’re a Gentile believer, you are saved and blessed because you’re connected to an Abrahamic root. We receive all of our blessing only because we are grafted in to the covenant of salvation that God made with Abraham. Look at Galatians 3:6-9:

6 In the same way, “ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, SO GOD DECLARED HIM RIGHTEOUS BECAUSE OF HIS FAITH.” 7 THE REAL CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM, THEN, ARE ALL THOSE WHO PUT THEIR FAITH IN GOD. 8 What’s more, the Scriptures looked forward to this time when God would accept the Gentiles, too, on the basis of their faith. GOD PROMISED THIS GOOD NEWS TO ABRAHAM LONG AGO WHEN HE SAID, “ALL NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED THROUGH YOU.” 9 AND SO IT IS: ALL WHO PUT THEIR FAITH IN CHRIST SHARE THE SAME BLESSING ABRAHAM RECEIVED BECAUSE OF HIS FAITH.

Then in verse 19 and 20 of Romans 11, Paul says:

19 “Well,” you may say, “those branches were broken off to make room for me.”

20 Yes, but remember—those branches, the Jews, were broken off because

*they didn't believe God, and you are there because you do believe. **Don't think highly of yourself, but fear what could happen.***

Paul wrote this to those who might think that because they replaced a branch that was broken off, that they're better than them. "If I'm not the root, at least I can say that I'm a better branch than the one that was broken off." Not so. We are to be very careful not to do this. Don't think too highly of yourself but rather develop a little healthy fear, and Paul tells us why in verse 21:

21 For if God did not spare the branches he put there in the first place, he won't spare you either.

Do you get the picture? Israel had not been provided any protection against their unbelief even though they were the chosen people of God. So Gentiles will certainly not be protected in their unbelief. We must have a healthy dose of humility and yes even fear in regard to the fact that we are chosen, saved, and blessed because of our faith in Jesus according to 1 Peter 1:17-19:

*17 And remember that the heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favorites when he judges. He will judge or reward you according to what you do. So you must live in **REVERENT FEAR** of him during your time as foreigners here on earth.*

18 For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And the ransom he paid was not mere gold or silver.

19 He paid for you with the precious lifeblood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God.

It is only the root of Jesus, the sinless blood of the Lamb, that feeds the branches of the tree and keeps them saved. We have no special status with God outside of our faith. If the Church enters into unbelief, God will cut off the Church, just as He cut off those among the Jews who refused to believe.

The Church has become so liberal and in so many ways denied the validity of Scripture and the lordship of Jesus Christ, it would not surprise me if God cut off the Church just like he cut off the Jewish nation. The Church that exists today is for the most part unbelieving. There is still a remnant of faithful believers in the Church, just as there is a remnant of faithful believers among the Jews. But the Church hardly even resembles any more what Jesus intended for it to be, and the day may be coming when He cuts it off. If you want to read about the destruction of the Church, just go to Revelation chapter 17 where you will find a detailed account. Next Paul writes (Romans 11:22):

*22 Notice how **God is both kind and severe.** He is severe to those who disobeyed, but kind to you as you continue to trust in his kindness. But if you stop trusting, you also will be cut off.*

Remember these verses are referring to peoples as a group and not individuals. You will not be cut off if you are a believer. Your salvation is secure. But if you belong to a church that doesn't believe faith in Christ is the only way to salvation, or you don't belong to a church and you think that way anyhow, you will be cut off. Do not take lightly either the grace of God or the judgment of God. Both are true, both are real. By your faith you can avail yourselves of the grace, kindness, and mercy of God, or by your arrogance and disobedience you can bring on yourselves the judgment of God.

To be a part of God's blessing, one must believe. The only people who maintain their place in the trunk of blessing are the faithful, both Jew and Gentile. Then in verse 23 we find a marvelous promise:

23 And even those of Israel, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again.

I believe this will all happen during the seven-year tribulation just before the return of Christ. The unbelieving Church will be cut off and Israel will be grafted back in. The destiny of Israel can and will be reversed, verse 24:

24 For if God was willing to take you who were, by nature, branches from a wild olive tree and graft you into his own good tree—a very unusual thing to do—he will be far more eager to graft the Jews back into the tree where they belong.

Sounds to me like such an occurrence is very possible. In fact it's promised (verse 25):

*25 I want you to understand this mystery, dear brothers and sisters, so that you will not feel proud and start bragging. Some of the Jews have hard hearts, but **this will last only until the complete number of Gentiles comes to Christ.***

There it is. It's promised that Israel will be grafted in as soon as all the believing Gentiles who will ever come to faith in Christ do so. God will then break off and destroy the unbelieving remnant of the Church, and graft the remainder of Israel back in and the great majority of the remaining Jews will accept Christ as Savior. We know this because of Ezekiel 20:33ff. What a day that should be. Then will come the millennial kingdom when Christ will return and establish His world government in Jerusalem. And all redeemed believers, both Jew and Gentile, will serve in positions of authority.

Romans 11:26 then tells us:

26 And so all Israel will be saved. Do you remember what the prophets said about this? "A Deliverer will come from Jerusalem, and he will turn Israel from all ungodliness.

What's the basic issue here? Faith. Whether you are Jew or Gentile, if you believe in the

Lord Jesus Christ, you're grafted in to the place of blessing where the life of God flows from the root through the trunk and into the branches producing a rich fruit.

The salvation of all of Israel will then signal the return of Christ and His setting up of His kingdom on the earth. You won't want to miss this. Don't let anything in this world prevent you from being there. Next week we'll conclude Romans 11 and perhaps even begin chapter 12.