

Romans 11:19-22 (NKJV)

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 (second person singular) also will be cut off.

First off we need to keep our **context** in mind. Paul is not primarily speaking about **individual** Christians or **individual** Jews. Just as an olive tree branch does not consist of **one olive**. There are **many olives** on a branch. And these are **branches** being grafted, not **individual olives** being picked. So we cannot start forming a wrong view of the election of individuals from our text. That is not what our text is about.

Our text is talking about the portions of the Jewish nation that have been removed from the true Kingdom of God, and the portions of Gentiles that have been grafted in.

19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in."

Suppose you are given the choice of selecting a picture for a publication. There are three pictures to choose from. You are one of the people **in that picture**. One of them depicts you in a favorable fashion. Two of them do not. Which picture will you pick? No matter what your answer, I think I have made my point. When you look at a photo that has you in it, **you** are the first thing you look at.

We are all like that. We evaluate the world based on what is best for us, what makes us feel special, what appeals to us. Now we may temper what **we do** with higher priorities, **as we should**, but we have a degree of self-centeredness that shows up in all we do. Phil Keaggy wrote a line in song that has always stuck with me. He said I've never had a selfless thought.

Well in verse 19 we have a picture of how **self-centeredness** skews our thinking. We hear that branches were broken off that I might be grafted in. We hear that someone was **excluded** so we could be **included**. And what do we think. **Yeah, that's just how special I am!** We have a tendency to always make everything be about us. But most of the time we are very very wrong.

I am going to veer somewhat off topic this morning and I pray that it is something that someone here this morning needs to hear.

There is still a lot of talk about self-esteem in our culture, **as if it is a wonderful thing** and everyone ought to have lots of it just because they exist. I've also found that those who **struggle** with self-esteem the most are usually the **most self-centered people**. That is how I was when I was a teenager. And the more you ponder your own navel, the more worthless you feel. And when you compare yourself to others, you continue to feel **less and less valuable**. I stayed in that spiral for a long time. Maybe some of you young people find yourself in that same spot. I found an unusual answer. Christ gave it 2000 years ago. He said love your neighbor as yourself. He also said love your brother.

I found that people have a tendency to **perceive my value** or to **experience** my value in direct relationship to that which I have to offer them. If I am all focused on myself, I don't bring anything to the relational picnic. It is only when I **focus on them**, when I focus on **their** needs, when I care about **their** lives that I provide something of value to them. And oddly enough, those people will tend to like me. They will tend to seek me out. They will tend to want to be with me.

The response we get from the people around us is usually not due to any **intrinsic value** that we hold. It is usually not that we are just **beacons** of attractiveness.

The response we get from others is usually directly related to how we treat them. Let me repeat this, because believing it is the first step in fixing most relational problems. **The response we get from others is usually directly related to how we treat them.** If people hide when we approach, we shouldn't ask how those people can be so awful that they would treat me so badly? We should ask, what am I doing that is causing them to react to me like that? In our Body life, in our marriages, in our families, when we face relationships that are falling apart, our first question should be, what have I done to cause this? We may find out that it truly is not our fault. But more often than not we will find that we are **doing things** that would cause **us** to respond the exact same way if the tables were turned. We would hide too if **we were them**.

It is very easy to blame our problem relationships on others. It is easy to pity ourselves as if there is something about us **genetically** that causes people not to esteem us. But that is usually simply a lie that will chain us to habits of bad behavior. Sometimes the truth of how it is **us** that **is the problem** is very hard to face. But it is **truth** that sets us free. It is truth that initiates changes in our lives. When we face relational problems, we do well to start with the question, what part did I play in creating this problem. Then we are well on our way to loving each other the way Christ said we should. Because our behavior is always something we can change. If you were to finish this sentence- It has always

bothered me that people have continually “blank” to me. If you finish that sentence you will find that **you** are the common denominator in all those relationships. And odds are that there is something **you** are doing that causes that response in people.

Now back to the text. We cannot afford to allow our selfishness to interpret God’s actions. We cannot project ourselves and our motives into God’s actions. It is true that God removed Jewish branches so Gentile branches could be included. That is all true. But to learn what that means we must hear from God. We need to believe what He says the reasons are. And let’s see what they are.

20 Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear.

Look at the focus here. It really doesn’t do much for our **individual estimations** of ourselves. Yes, the Jews were removed so Gentiles could be plugged in. But the reason is not about how wonderfully attractive **the Gentiles** were. No. It is all about **belief**. It is all about our **response to Grace**. It is all about believing God’s word is true or not.

The Jews weren’t removed because they were **inferior** to the Gentiles. The Jews would be there still today except for their **unbelief**. The Jews could not accept all the words of the Old Testament. They could not accept a suffering servant for a Messiah. They could not accept the rebuke of the Son of God. They could not receive Him as their savior. Because they had unbelieving hearts. They weren’t excluded because they were **inferior**. They were rejected because of what they **would not do. They would not believe.**

So they were broken off. God does not play games with people. He doesn’t have a bleeding heart whereby no matter how awful you treat Him, He will never respond negatively to you. No. If you want to foster unbelief, **you can**. If you want to turn your back on God, **you can**. God will **grease the tracks** in whatever direction you want to go. But there are always **repercussions**. There are always consequences to your actions.

The Jews vastly overestimated the sentimentality of their attachment to God. They did not believe they could, in large part, be cut off from God. **But they were wrong**. They were in large part, cut off.

And how about the Gentiles. How did they get in? Was it our natural **likeableness**? Were we just that captivating to God? No. There is nothing **natural** about it. It is all **supernatural**. It is all inspired by God. We see in our text it says **you stand by faith**. There is the difference and the **only** difference between those who are in the kingdom and those who are not. Some were given

the faith to believe in Christ. Oddly enough it was Bob Dylan in one of his songs who said "Either you got faith or you got unbelief, there ain't no neutral ground." Those are the two choices. Faith or unbelief.

The only reason that anyone will enter heaven is because of **faith**. There has **never been**, nor will there **ever be**, a human virtue that will play a part in a person's entrance into the Kingdom of God. There is only one thing that matters. **Do we believe what God says** to the point we will do what He commands and will believe what He tells us. Do you believe that you are a sinner and have earned God's wrath upon your life? Do you believe that Christ died in the place of every sinner who would ever believe upon Him? Do you believe that He took your wrath upon Himself so that when **He** died He paid the **full penalty** for every sin that you would ever commit? And do you trust Him as your Savior and Lord so that your life is now lived in a **joyful and grateful response** to what He did for you?

That is what faith is. And again, that is the only quality **needed** and the only quality **required** for a person to enter heaven. And that is the difference between those broken off and those grafted in.

Now if that is true there is lots of reason for Paul's next statement.

Do not be haughty, but fear.

Why would anyone be haughty? It would only be because they thought they **were better** than the Jews. But since that is not true at all, since the only difference is faith or unbelief, we should fear.

This is interesting. Do not be haughty. Do you realize that Paul here is warning the gentiles to avoid the very sin that the Jews were guilty of. The **Jews** thought that they were untouchable. They thought they were a superior people. They thought they were the **top dogs** and everyone else was **second class**. And that is the very thing that these Gentiles were being warned against. Evidently in this period of history there was a lot of Jewish persecution. And it was largely from the hand of Gentiles. The Jews acted different. They wouldn't assimilate into any of the cultures they lived in. They stood out. And that won them the **not so admiring attention** of their neighbors. It was a real danger that the churches would join into the society around them and regard the Jews in a haughty, superior manner. Paul here warns them against it.

Do not be haughty. Don't be proud. Pride. Isn't that the downfall of any solid Christian walk. We are warned against this in scripture so often. We are warned to view ourselves soberly. We are told to regard others above ourselves. We are told to humble ourselves. But if you give us long enough, don't we all tend to

start to trust ourselves more than we trust God? We start thinking that **things we perceive** are more important than **what God says**. We start thinking we should have the things that we want just because we want them. We start thinking we have some kind of right to them just because we want them so badly. And what is that all? It is a result of pride. We have forgotten who we are. We have forgotten the price that was paid to save us. We have forgotten our place as servants in the kingdom of heaven.

If you ever begin to think that pride has no place in your life just watch your life closely. You will find it coming out all over the place. Any time we think people are in our lives **to serve us** in any way instead of seeing them as people that **we are here to serve** you will see pride. If you think that you can vent your frustration onto people instead of looking for a way to build them up you will find pride. If you begin to disdain people for the weaknesses and the failings they portray you will find pride. It is ever so persistent in our lives. That is why Paul had to warn these Romans. He made one point of doctrine but he knew the human nature so well that he knew what the next thought would be. If someone was moved out of my way so that I could be moved in, that proves it. I must be better than them.

How hideous. But how normal.

That's how people like our president can rationalize that he deserves government paid vacations in exotic locations paid for by people who will only ever make a fraction of what he makes. Pride. Somehow he thinks he is better than those he serves. You expect that in the world. But we cannot abide it in our own souls. We cannot afford it. And Paul warns against it.

Let's look at First Corinthians.

Paul had just told the Corinthians about the Old Testament examples of failures by his Chosen people. They sinned in all kinds of ways. And then he says this.

1 Corinthians 10:11-12 (NKJV)

11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

We cannot afford to be cocky. We cannot afford to think that we are better than anyone. We cannot afford to think that anyone is our servant. We must see ourselves as being theirs. We cannot afford to look down our noses at anyone. We cannot despise others for not reaching some level that we believe we have reached. That is all pride. And pride truly does go before a fall.

Where does pride raise its head in your life?

Why should we fear?

21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.

This makes perfect sense in Paul's argument. If we **were** won by some innate **virtue**, if this wasn't about how we respond to God but by some **innate genetics**, we could get pretty cocky. We could start to think that just because we breathe, we are good to go with God.

But if this inclusion of the gentiles is due to a condition that must be met, if it is due to that fact of belief, then that **condition being met** becomes of utmost importance. It is not something that can be taken for granted. It is not something that can fall into the background. It is something that will always need focused upon. It will always need to be the focus of scrutiny.

Note that it says God did not **spare** them. God did not keep them back. God did not allow them to continue on the tree. God did not keep them connected to Himself relationally. We need to realize this about God. This is something that we should have proper respect for, proper fear for. We cannot establish **some kind of account with God that will guaranty those who come after us a place with God**. Every new generation has to establish a relationship with God. They need to respond by faith to what Christ has said.

No one goes to heaven because they are a Baptist or Mennonite or Pentecostal. No one goes to heaven because they are a Frantz or Riley or Friend or Zeigler. You must believe. It must be **you** who responds to God's call on your life. Being part of this church does nothing to include you into heaven. You must have faith. Being part of this church will help you grow in faith, but the church cannot **give that** to you. You must respond to Christ.

Salvation always hinges on that response. And if you do not, you will not be spared. It doesn't matter how much God loves **your father and mother**. You must have faith.

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 (second person singular) also will be cut off.

We will spend the rest of this morning on this text.

First let's look at the words.

First the word for severity has the root meaning of cutting off or cutting quickly so it corresponds with the idea at the end of the verse where it says you also will be cut off.

Fell means those who fell down so as to be completely ruined, like the fall of the Roman empire.

Now let's look at this.

I have a question for you this morning.

What is the most important thing for Paul's audience to understand in order to live as they should?

The answer is that the most important thing is **for Christians to understand God as He has revealed Himself.**

Let me put this negatively. What is the thing that is **most detrimental** to the Christian life? It is the **lack** of the knowledge of God.

What Paul appeals to with his Roman audience is that they would pay attention to, that they would think about, that they would roll around in their minds this one thing. **The character of God.** And to be more specific, two things. The **goodness** of God and the **severity** of God.

Now there is a lot of Oprah Winfryism in the world today. There are a lot of self styled thinkers who **say** a lot of stuff about God. But listen to them closely and you will find that they absolutely **will not consider** the goodness and severity of God. They will consider His **goodness**. But you will never hear anything from them **about severity**. They will paint a picture, like a lot of the Emergent Church proponents, of things that people would perceive as being **good and kind and positive** about God. But they absolutely will not consider that God will cut people off and destine them for hell if they will not receive the Gospel message of Christ. They will not consider that God will **punish eternally**, however that works out, **everyone** who rejects what Christ did for them.

But a **believer** is someone who believes more quotes that God gave about Himself than the quote that **God is love**. They also believe that God is **Just**. They believe that God is an **avenging fire**. They believe that God is **Holy**. They believe that God **hates sin**.

So you see, it is important that we as believers consider God as He really is. And how is He?

He is kind and He is severe. We must keep that in mind. To believe in God we must believe in Him **as He is**, not how **we wish He were** or how we **imagine He is**. God is kind. We know that. We have experienced that. We have learned about how God has **reached out to us**. We know that, before we ever **considered Him**, He was reaching out to us. We know that He died for us. We know that He called us who are believers. We know that He put this church together to meet our needs. We know that He has worked everything out for the good of those who love Him. We know of His kindness.

But what of His sternness? We need to keep this in mind as well. God is not one to simply overlook sin. He will never brush it under the carpet. He will never pretend that it does not exist. We might think we are being kind when **we do** such a thing but **God is not kind** in that way. In fact it is not kind when **we** are that way. We mistake apathy for forgiveness. No, God is stern. The greatest evidence of His sternness is the death of Christ. If ever God were to overlook sin, it would have been **the sin that Christ was carrying**. After all, it was not sin that **Christ** had committed. Surely we would think that God would let **that** slide. But we know that He **did not** let it slide. God gave sin its **fullest penalty**, even when it was **His Son** who was bearing the sin. If you ever begin to believe that God doesn't care about sin, that God is not stern, that God is only love, remember Calvary. Remember His crucifixion. God is truly stern.

This is also a truth that should be part of our **evangelistic** message. Mike often said **the only reason for a person to come to Christ is because of sin**. Martyn Lloyd Jones says that **"man's only need ultimately is to be reconciled to God. Nothing else."** And the thing that is so compelling about sin is the sternness of God. After all, if sin did not hold much of a penalty, who would **care** about sin? But the problem is that sin holds a severe penalty and God is a stern God. That is the most compelling reason to come to Christ.

When we present a **man centered** evangelism we may find two things.

First a man may not have a need that he truly believes needs met. He may feel fine. He may be completely happy with his life. He may see himself as being a morally superior person without any compulsion to make a change in his life.

Second, if he **does** respond to a man centered evangelism, he will respond to a message but he will only respond on **his terms**. He is looking to get something and is willing to spend a certain price to get it. But he is not convinced it is **worthy of his life** nor is he likely to think that it **should cost his life** to get it. So when the call for true discipleship comes forward, this convert will have no interest in such a thing. He may want rid of his loneliness or his alcoholism or his nasty behavior, but he is not willing to give up his pride and his control of his life, except to get something to improve his life.

But when we present a **God** centered evangelism we are telling people the danger they are in, and it doesn't matter what **they feel** about their current life. It doesn't matter what deal they are interested in cutting with God. God says they have a need because they are sinners. God says He will annihilate them if they

remain in their sin. And God offers the good news that says **there is a way out** through Christ, under His absolute terms with no negotiations. That is **God centered evangelism** and that is what mankind needs to know. When they respond to this evangelism they will be saved. And they will submit to the Lordship of Christ and be glad to do so.

We will finish this text next week. In the meantime, let's consider **just how much** we allow our lives to gravitate around ourselves. Let's do business with looking at relationships by asking, what am I doing that is causing this kind of reaction? Let's look for the way ego and pride intrude into our day to day lives. So that we can apply gratitude for God's goodness and fear of His stern-ness in a proper and thorough manner.