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Romans

Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. Romans 11:20

Paul's pre-emptive argumentation (and what could possibly be based on the spoken sentiments of that time by some counted among the faithful) continues in today's verse. He noted that some of the branches of the olive tree were broken off, thus allowing the gentiles to be grafted in. Surely they must be more favored than the broken off branches, right? But Paul dismisses such a notion.

"Well said" is an adverb meaning "rightly" or "true." In essence, "Yes, they were broken off and you were grafted in; that is correct." He is being extremely tact in his wording, granting a portion of their logic. "The thought is true, and I grant you that, but..." He will thereby make a deflection from their own thought in order to bolster the true intent of the matter. And so he continues - it was "because of unbelief they were broken off."

These natural branches, which were born into the main root of the tree, were broken off because they failed to accept and believe in God's provision. Having viewed these verses concerning the "branches" thus far, it needs to be questioned whether what is being discussed is concerning the process of election and salvation of individuals or rather the calling to salvation of select groups, meaning "Jew" or "Gentile." Based on the entirety of what has been given by Paul, it must be speaking of the second view - the calling of salvation to these larger categories.

Why is this important to know? It bears heavily on the doctrine of "replacement theology," a concept held among older denominations and also held among cults. Older denominations believe that they have replaced Israel and are thus entitled to the entire scope of blessings and promises which were given to Old Testament Israel. Another example is the cult known as the "Jehovah's Witnesses" who claim that a certain portion of their members are the "144,000" mentioned in the book of Revelation. However, in Revelation this group is divided by the names of the tribes of Israel.

If the type of salvation Paul is speaking of is individual rather than by group, how could they be re-grafted back into the tree (as is noted in verses 23 and 24) if the intended process of restoration is something that will come about at an unknown and distant point in the future (as is noted in verses 25 and 26)? Replacement theology overall, and the mindset of such lesser cults and sects, makes no sense when looked at in the larger context of Paul's words here.

Using the "Jehovah's Witnesses" for example, how could they make such a claim about being the 144,000 if they were broken off branches? They wouldn't be a people now if the promises were future. The same is true with other replacement theology ideas. How could they claim to be a part of the "currently saved" if they were claiming to be the very branches that were broken off. Either the branches are national Israel, or they aren't. If they are, then God has an intention for national Israel in the future. If those branches aren't national Israel, then there is no group now in God's favor according to the gospel because the people who claim to be Israel are the broken off branches. There is no soundness in reason concerning this passage when replacement theology is the consideration.

Rather, the gentiles, who are currently grafted in, have been so grafted because they "stand by faith." We cannot claim superiority over the Jews. They were cast off for disbelief; we are grafted in by faith. The playing field is level and we all stand or fall by faith alone. And so Paul gives his warning to those who feel so elevated, "Do not be haughty, but fear." He is telling us to not be smug or over-confident, but to accept our position with humility. We have been saved by God's grace and there is nothing to boast of concerning this favor. Paul will explain this further in the verses ahead.

Life application: How were you saved? By deeds that made God happy? No. Rather, you came to God through Jesus Christ with empty hands and a rent heart. Don't forget the mercy which was lavished upon you. Remember your salvation with humility and gratitude.

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

Romans 11:21

The olive tree symbolizes much about Israel. It remains green throughout the year which pictures God's eternal and enduring faithfulness to His covenant promises. Its fatness can be interpreted as the great privileges and honors of being Israel. No other nation has ever been so blessed; no other people have endured and prospered as they have. When cut down, the olive tree will sprout again out of the stump, just as Israel has been cut down and re-sprouted on several occasions. The symbolism of the olive and of Israel goes on in many other ways, all showing us the tie between God and this select group of people.

They are termed by Paul "the natural branches." This is an indication that they are the select and cherished group of people who are God's "special treasure" (Deuteronomy 7:6). Through them God displayed His glory in the parting of the sea. Through them came the Law, given at Sinai. To them was given God's special and chosen portion of land. Through them came the oracles of God, and through Israel came the Messiah, the Lord Jesus. With all of this history, heritage, privilege, and honor one would think that Israel would be safe from judgment. But such isn't the case. Their failures and rejections of God and His word and of His Son, led to them being broken off branches.

Because God looked upon this special group of natural branches and deemed that they were to be broken off, Paul warns the gentiles, "He may not spare you either." If the natural branches can go, how much more easily can the unnatural branches be broken off? Paul hands the gentiles a sobering reminder of their tenuous position. We have been grafted in and we can be cut off again.

Unless one dismisses the doctrine of "eternal salvation," the only logical conclusion is that these verses (as noted in the Romans 11:22 commentary) are speaking of Israel as a group, not as individuals. Not all Jews had or have been cut off. Rather, the majority which speaks of the whole were broken off. In like manner, Paul must be speaking then about the majority, not the individual, concerning gentiles. In other words the term "He may not spare you" is not speaking of a loss of salvation, but a loss of overall status - the primacy of the gentiles during this dispensation.

Life application: We stand in Christ because of the work of Christ. Let us not forget that He did all the work so that we may receive the many blessings of God in Christ. Be ever-thankful for the greatness of the work of Jesus!

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. Romans 11:22

"Therefore" asks us to go back and consider the preceding verses. Paul spoke of branches being broken off and branches being grafted in. These things were explained so that we could understand what has happened and what could happen based on whether God's people continue in Him or apart from Him. Based on his words, he states "Therefore...."

"Consider the goodness and severity of God." We are asked to reflect on how God deals with man. He is good in His very being and longs to bestow that goodness upon us if we will but receive it. When we do, and when we continue in that goodness, then we are the objects of His favor and the recipients of His many graces. This is how it should be and how God would have it at all times. However, there is a contrast; it is the "severity of God."

When we fail to remain in God's goodness, then the opposite of His goodness is the result. This does not indicate any change in God who is unchanging in His being. Rather, this indicates a positional movement on our part. Imagine a fixed

column. If we are in God's good graces because of obedience we will be on one side of the column. If we fail to remain in that state, we move positionally to the other side of the fixed column. Thus, without change in God, we receive His severity because of our choice of failing to comply.

This is what was prophesied to Israel concerning obedience and disobedience, and this is what resulted from those states. Paul says now that we are no different. Though the spiritual banner has passed to the gentiles, can we expect different treatment from the God who does not change? Of course not! Instead, we can only expect the same treatment.

This is what we need to learn from Paul's introduction - "Therefore, consider the goodness and severity of God..." At the same time, God's attributes will be viewed differently by the different groups. During Israel's time of punishment Paul explains, "on those who fell, severity." They have received His judgment because they didn't remain in God's goodness. Contrasting that, he next speaks of what occurred toward the gentiles, "but toward you, goodness."

Israel's fall meant "riches for the world." God's goodness has been lavished upon the gentile peoples. His favor has been directed to a people who are not a people. But there is a caveat concerning our favored status which is "if you continue in His goodness." Israel didn't and they were cut off. The same then, based on the unchanging nature of God, must be true. Speaking to the gentiles, he notes that if they continue in His goodness, they will receive His goodness, "otherwise you will be cut off."

If God's chosen and beloved nation was cut off, especially considering that they are natural branches, then what should the wild branches expect? The same severity; an abrupt change in the situation as they are cut off from His goodness.

Having seen this train of thought, as summed up in this "therefore," it should be evident now that this verse cannot be speaking of individual salvation. In other words, it is speaking on a "group" level, not an "individual" level. This is not a

verse which is acceptable to support the erroneous view that one can lose their salvation. Everything must be taken in context or it is a pretext. Disregard any commentary which points to this verse as substantiation for the loss of salvation. If you are in Christ, you are saved - past, present, and future.

Life application: Always check the context of a verse carefully. Who is the thought being addressed to? What are the surrounding verses teaching? What is the overall message which is being conveyed? Can this verse stand alone or is it dependent on other verses to make a point? Etc. Keep these things in mind and may your doctrine be pure and undefiled.

And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. Romans 11:23

Paul is in essence repeating himself in this verse. So far in verses 1 & 2, 11 & 12, and 15 he has indicated that Israel is not completely cut off. He is building on each thought and adding to it so that we can see what has happened and why. Today repeats the "why" of verse 20. The Jews as a whole (not all individuals) were broken off because of unbelief. Now we are told that this state of unbelief does not have to be final. "If they do not continue in unbelief..."

It has already been hinted that they won't so continue (verse 12) and it will be explicitly stated in verses 25 through 27.

- 1) Being a part of the Olive tree is conditional on belief
- 2) The Jewish people as a whole failed to believe and were broken off
- 3) If they do not continue in unbelief (as is indicated that they won't), they will be grafted in
- 4) Therefore, God will graft them in again because
- 5) God is able to graft them in again

This current state of unbelief is because of their pursuing the law as a means to the end. They will realize this as a faulty approach in the future. Paul explains this in 2 Corinthians 3. Pursuing the law leaves a veil over the eyes of those who so pursue it, but "the veil is taken away in Christ" (2 Corinthians 3:14). Such is the work of the Spirit. It is life from the dead; even the long-dead branches which were broken off. God is able to bring them back to life and graft them again into His holy tree.

Life application: Nobody is so far from God that they cannot be brought to spiritual life. And a large part of our work here should be geared towards that premise. Prayer is something we can all participate in. Find the person that you dislike the most in your heart, if there is such a person, and make a concerted effort to pray for them. Christ died for them too.

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?

Romans 11:24

Today we see an explanatory statement of the previous verse - "And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again." Paul will now expand on this, giving insights into why this is so.

"For" will reveal how God is able to graft the Jews again into the spiritual root, and not only that, but that it is a more likely event than one might expect. Speaking to the gentiles, Paul says, "If you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature..." The natural way of grafting is exactly the opposite. Normally one takes a cultivated branch and grafts it into a wild root. The wild root will already be acclimated to its surroundings. It will be able to withstand the climatic conditions, any indigenous bugs and pests, etc. However, it's fruit will be of a less quality, possibly of no value at all.

And so in order to have a tree which can withstand the contrary conditions and yet produce yummy fruit, the cultivated grafts are placed into the wild roots.

Hence, you have the hardiness of the life-support and the yummysity of the cultivated graft. The graft remains unchanged, despite its new surroundings. As Paul says, what occurred with the gentiles is that they "were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree..."

The wild graft, with its lesser-quality fruit is grafted into the higher quality root! This is a humbling thought when rightly considered. It is the Jew who originally...

Has the higher-quality root

Who also bears the yummiest fruit

So much for boasting on the part of the gentiles! Because of their more noble origins and their ability to more readily accept their own root, "how much more will these, who are the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?"

Paul is asking the gentiles to reflect on what occurred and how it was contrary to what they knew from nature. It is they, not the Jews, who were grafted in this contrary manner. If we readily understood and accepted the message and the spiritual nourishment of Christ, how much more will the Jews when God grafts them in!

This doesn't mean, please understand, that God actively breaks off and grafts. God knows all things in advance, including the coming return of Israel to the life-giving root, but his foreknowledge isn't necessarily causative in nature. He simply knows in advance what will occur and tells us of it before it comes about, asking us to pay attention to both the prophecy and then its fulfillment.

This is why it becomes so important for the church to open their eyes to the return of Israel to their homeland; to their reestablishment as a united people; and to the blossoming Messianic movement among the Jews. God's plans are coming to their fulfillment and Israel, His natural branches, are being grafted in to

His holy root. At some point, it will become a national movement and a cry for the return of the Lord. What the impetus for this will be is yet uncertain, but it is coming and it will usher in a time of unmatched wonder on earth. Coming soon to a millennial kingdom near you.

Life application: Israel! Pray for Israel and be willing to speak to the Jewish people about the wonder of Christ and how they are actually closer to Him than they realize. Read and know your Old Testament because it is the tie which you can use to connect them to the One who is its fulfillment.