

Eternity Daily Bible Study

Romans 9-16 The Implications of Salvation

PLEASE PRAY FOR THE MINISTRY OF THE AIBI

Number: 601

Verses: Romans 11:16-24

Topic: The Olive Tree Of God

Date: 11th December 2006

Romans 11:16-24 MKJV *For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, also 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 became a sharer of the root and the fatness of the olive tree with them, (18) do not boast against the branches. But if you boast, it is not you that bears the root, but the root bears you. (19) You will say then, The branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in. (20) Well, because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be high-minded, but fear. (21) For if God did not spare the natural branches, fear lest He also may not spare you either! (22) Behold then the kindness, and the severity of God; on those having fallen, severity; but on you, kindness, if you continue in the kindness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. (23) And those 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 natural wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree; how much more these being according to nature will be grafted into their own olive-tree?*

In this theological illustration of Paul's Israel is the natural olive tree and the "holy root", and the Gentiles are the wild olive tree and the "branches". The purpose is to warn the Gentile Roman Christians to a) fear God b) respect Israel and c) continue in faith. A secondary point is that God does not select people according to their ethnicity, but according to their faith.

The olive tree is an ancient symbol of spirituality, with olive oil being a symbol of anointing (Exodus 29:7), healing (James 5:14) and of the Holy Spirit (Zechariah 4:1-12, Matthew 25:1-13) and the olive tree being a symbol of "spiritual Israel" (Jeremiah 11:16, Hosea 14:6, Romans 11:17,24).

Paul sees Israel as the source of holiness in the Church. Holiness spreads outward from the first part of the lump to the whole, or upwards from the root to the branches. *For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, also the branches.* Things that were "most holy" could transmit holiness to whatever they touched: **Exodus 29:37 MKJV** *You shall make an atonement for the altar seven days, and sanctify it. And it shall be a most holy altar. Whatever touches the altar shall be holy.* By this principle holy Israel "sanctified" the Gentiles who were grafted into the Church.

Paul's illustration is agriculturally unusual. Generally the wild olive was the sturdy root and the fruitful cultivated olive was grafted on to it. To do it the other way around (a fruitful cultivated root with a wild olive grafted on top) would produce a scraggly and unfruitful plant. No one would do it! The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia says the following: *As a rule the wild olive is but a shrub, with small leaves, a stem more or*

less prickly, and a small, hard drupe with but little or no oil. That a wild olive branch should be grafted into a fruitful tree would be a proceeding useless and contrary to Nature

So Paul is using a startling (and almost insulting) illustration to make his point that the Gentile church was a mere scraggly offshoot grafted onto a magnificent Jewish root! When the true stock was grafted back on – that is when the fruit and oil would come forth! The point was that the Gentiles were not to despise the Jews - *"do not boast against the branches. But if you boast, it is not you that bears the root, but the root bears you."*

The root of Christianity is Jewish – the patriarchs, the prophets, the various authors of the books of the Bible, the twelve apostles, and the leaders of the early Church were all Jews - and of course Jesus Himself was Jewish. The rest of us are grafted into this Jewish root.

However, as we have seen, most Jews did not believe the gospel. They thought their religion was "good enough" and needed no improvement. They did not believe in the revelation that came in Jesus Christ, and because of this unbelief they were "broken off".

Paul calls this "the kindness and severity of God" - *Behold then the kindness, and the severity of God; on those having fallen, severity; but on you, kindness, if you continue in the kindness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.*

If the Gentiles refuse to believe they will meet the same fate as the Jews – falling from grace and being "cut off" from salvation. Therefore the Gentiles are not to take salvation for granted, as if it was some sort of expected right, but rather they were to walk in the fear of God: *Do not be high-minded, but fear. (21) For if God did not spare the natural branches, fear lest He also may not spare you either!*

It is as if God is a gardener who prunes away all unfruitful branches. This aspect of God's character is also reflected in the parable of the vine-dresser in John 15:1-8

John 15:1-8 MKJV *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 one that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bring forth more fruit. (3) Now you are clean through the Word which I have spoken to you. (4) Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it remains 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, the same brings forth much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (6) If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered. And they gather and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. (7) If you abide in Me, and My Words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done to you. (8) In this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, so you shall be My disciples.*

The common element in both parables is that God wants us to live fruitful lives, abiding in Him, being joined to both the Christ-Vine and the Church-Olive Tree by faith. However in both parables God is also severe on the useless, dry and unfruitful branches and they are "cut off" and burned.

There is a lesson here – if we abide in Christ, then the kindness and grace of God flows into us and we bear much fruit, but if we refuse to believe then kindness and grace cannot flow to us, and if kindness cannot flow, then the only alternative is severity. The dry dead branches are cut off and thrown away!

The proper response to this is holy fear, that is a diligent carefulness about one's spiritual life to keep it within the bounds set by God and to obey His commandments. God is the source of 100% of our spiritual life and so we must stay close to Him!

Finally Paul says that the Jews have not fallen completely, they can in fact be grafted back in again once they believe and it will be a natural fit:

23) And those 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 natural wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree; how much more these being according to nature will be grafted into their own olive-tree?

Blessings,

John Edmiston (johned@aibi.ph)
Chairman/ CEO
Antioch Internet Bible International
<http://www.aibi.ph>

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