

(13) Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

(17) But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you.

(19) Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. *So do not become proud, but fear.* For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you. Note the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in His kindness. Otherwise, you too will be cut off.

(23) And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own tree.

Think on These Things

- 1) Paul commonly began his ministry in Jewish synagogues in whatever towns he visited as an evangelist. Inevitably, though, preaching Christ crucified to the Jews resulted in him being expelled from their gatherings --- and so then he began sharing with the Gentiles. What was his motive in doing this (vs. 13-14)?

Paul accepted that God had appointed him as the Apostle to the Gentiles. Thus, he embraced this role completely with an eye to make fellow Jews jealous and envious during his travels --- hoping some of them would respond to the Gospel and also be saved by faith in Jesus.

- 2) Jewish rejection brought reconciliation of the whole world to God (v.15). What does Paul say a believing Jew is like?

He likens this idea to be "life from the dead."

- 3) Paul now begins using the analogy of a large, cultivated olive tree to discuss Jews & Gentiles. The Jews are God's original cultivated tree with a holy root that nourishes all the branches. According to v.17, what is happening to some natural branches due to disobedience and unbelief? How does that impact us? What is Paul's word of caution to us?

Because of unbelief (v.20), the 'natural' Jew branches are being broken off and removed from the cultivated tree. Gentiles --- outsiders --- considered 'wild' olive tree branches, are being grafted into this same tree because of coming into belief. While it is true that branches are being broken off so that (we) wild branches can be grafted into it, our response should be one of awe and fearful reverence --- and NOT pride! We are seeing both the kindness and severity of God.... If He can replace the natural branches, He can also replace the wild ones, too!

- 4) Jesus used a similar analogy in the Gospels. Read John 15:1-8. Jesus' teaching is not about being saved, but being a fruitful Christian. Key points to grasp: How can we be fruitful? If we are fruitful, what will the gardener do with us? If we aren't fruitful, what will the gardener do with us? Looking at verses 9 & 17, how does Jesus apply this teaching about fruitfulness?

In this teaching, Jesus describes Himself as a grapevine, and God the Father as the farmer (vinedresser). He says we are the branches --- and He's looking for fruit! To produce fruit, we must abide (remain) "in Him." If we do, we can produce much fruit. The Father will also prune our branches to produce even more fruit. However, if we don't abide and remain (in Him), but become an isolated branch, we cannot produce any fruit. Consequently, the Father will remove all the unproductive branches from the vine, set them aside, and then burn them. In chapter 15, Jesus equates abiding in Him as a relationship built on love (vs. 9, 17)!

- 5) According to v.20, how does a Christian become part of this tree? How should this impact our relationship with God?

We become part of this tree when we stand fast through faith (v.20). Faith means to express trust and confidence in God's reliability --- He WILL come through! Thus, many people feel a sense of gratitude for God's kindness, the relief of having a heavy burden (of sin) removed. In our own eyes, God is exalted, and we are humbled!

- 6) Verses 21-22 ask us to remember that with God's good side, there is also the harsh side, here discussed as kindness and severity. Is He Elijah's powerful God of "fire from the sky" or Jesus' "loving heavenly Father"? How can He be both? What words might you use to describe proper feelings any person should have towards the Almighty God?

V.20 identifies our frame of mind -> we are to have a "fear" of God. It can and does include the sense of being scared and fearful. But, more properly, it means to be reverent and in awe of an all-powerful, almighty being. Be grateful that He shows us kindness! Nobody wants to fall into the hands of Living God. Hebrews 10:31 speaks about human dread at the thought of falling into the hands of a wrathful God!

Paul's key warning here is don't become proud and haughty in God's sight in matters of being saved and included in His family. We've done NOTHING to deserve this. We receive God's kindness and grace ONLY because Jesus died on the cross to bring us forgiveness of sin.

- 7) When you read v.23, what do you think God intends to do with Jews who come to belief? What is implied as the outcome for a Gentile believer who becomes disobedient and faithless (v.22)?

V.23 says that if He wants to, God has the power to graft back into the tree believing Jews. The warning of v.22 is that if God maintained a high standard for His chosen people (Jews), He will also maintain a high standard for His elect people (Gentiles). If we fall away in pride and independence, He will not spare us either.

People and situations I want to pray for this week: