

Romans

Broken Off, Grafted In

November 01, 2015

I. Some Jews Broken Off, Some Gentiles Grafted In

A. Romans 11:16-24 . . . If the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too. [17] But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, [18] do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. [19] You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." [20] Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; [21] for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. [22] Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. [23] And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. [24] For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?

B. Prayer

II. Some Jews broken off, some Gentiles grafted in, and a warning

A. The immediate, though fuller context of Romans 11:16-24 begins back in Romans 11:13, where Paul says: "But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles."

1. And what Paul is teaching in this section provides his concluding remarks to the larger context of Romans 9 – 11:12, in which Paul has primarily been explaining why he says that many of the Jews are separated from God's love, when he also said at the end of Romans 8 that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.
2. Therefore, here at the beginning of Romans 11:13, Paul begins his warning to Gentile believers that what has happened between God and the unbelieving Jews can happen to them if they are not careful.
3. So with this in mind, we will move to vs 16 where Paul directly addresses his warning.

B. Romans 11:16 . . . If the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too.

1. Vs 16 states a general principle, and Paul uses two examples to make his point: a piece of dough that produces a larger lump of dough, and a tree root that produces a tree with many branches. And the principle expressed by both the dough and root example is that if what begins it all is holy, what comes from it is holy.
2. Though Paul does not specifically say what the first piece of dough and the root represent, the context makes it reasonable to assume they represent Abraham – in relation to the OT believers, and Jesus Christ – in relation to NT believers. Therefore, the starting place for Paul's warning to the Gentiles is that those born of Abraham and those born of Jesus Christ, are holy.
3. However, though this principle is true in most cases, it is not always true. We know from nature, history, life experience, the context of Romans 9-11, and the rest of scripture that there are exceptions to this principle. And I want to take a few minutes to look at the exceptions for two reasons.
 - a. First, to help us better understand the rest of Romans 11 in the light of vs 16.
 - b. Second, to remind you of the importance of reading each portion of scripture with all of scripture in mind – so that you seek to understand the immediate statement within its immediate context, and that immediate context within the larger context of the surrounding chapters, the whole book, and the entire Bible.
4. With those two reasons in mind, let's look at the Biblical support for the fact that there are exceptions to the principle that if what begins it all is holy, what comes from it is holy.
 - a. One of the clearest example of the principle coupled with an exception is found in Jesus' parable of the four soils. According to Jesus' explanation, the good soil (4th soil) exemplifies the principle while the rocky soil (2nd soil) is an example of the exception to the principle (Matthew 13:18-23).
 - b. This same principle and its exceptions are spoken of in Isaiah 1:2, 27-28 . . . Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; for the LORD speaks, "Sons I have reared and brought up, but they have revolted against Me. [27] Zion will be redeemed with justice and her repentant ones with righteousness. [28] But transgressors and sinners will be crushed together, and those who forsake the LORD will come to an end. (*All are Israelites, but two outcomes.*)

- c. Returning to Jesus, we have His parable of the talents, where three servants are given money to invest for their master. Now remember, all are servants of the master, so all have the same relationship with the master. The first two servants exemplify the rule by making investments that produce a return, and the master rewards them. The third servant is an example of the exception, for from fear of losing what was entrusted to him, he hid it in the ground and returned it upon his master's return. The master punished this servant by throwing him out into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 25:30).
- d. In writing to Timothy, Paul said that "the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1-3). (*To fall away, you have to stand or be attached.*)
- e. And my last example of the principle with an exception comes from Jesus, who said, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 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" (John 15:1-2). (*If we use Paul's example of being grafted in, then to be in Christ is to be grafted into Him.*)
- f. The point of these scriptures is to show that there is a principle, and most often the principle works as stated, yet because of the weakness and waywardness of human nature, there are exceptions.
- g. And going on from here, we see that Paul drops the dough example and uses only the root and branches to make his point.

C. Romans 11:17-18 . . . But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, [18] do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you.

- 1. The picture Paul gives us is this: there is a cultivated olive tree whose branches – according to the principle stated in vs 16, ought to be bearing good, cultivated olives.
 - a. The branches growing out of this tree represent those who have lived by faith from Abraham forward, and those who are presently living by faith in Jesus Christ. The wild olive tree branches that have been grafted in represent the Gentiles believers.

- b. However, some of the branches have been broken off, and at this point in Paul's explanation, they represent Jews who have fallen into or given way to unbelief and are living accordingly.
 - 2. Paul's purpose in using this example is to warn us – the grafted in Gentiles – not to let arrogance take over so that we begin thinking that we are now so special to God that He would never break us off as He did the unbelieving Jews.
 - a. However, should any of us become arrogant and begin thinking we are too special to God for Him to break us off, Paul says we are to bring ourselves back to our senses by remembering that we do not give life to the root, but the root gives its life to us.
 - b. And the remembering who gives life to whom should result in arrogance destroying humility. And here is why.
 - (1) The root is not made holy because the branches are holy, rather we, the branches are made holy because the root is holy. Therefore, there is no room for pride or arrogance in relation to salvation and sanctification because they come from God as gracious gifts to undeserving sinners who cannot save themselves or make themselves holy apart from the life of God within us.
 - (2) Therefore, rather than being arrogant about having been grafted in – while some of God's chosen people, the Jews have been broken off – we ought to be exceedingly careful (*fear*) not to give the gardener reasons to break us off.
- D. Romans 11:19 . . . You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in."
 - 1. This time Paul is looking at the problem of spiritual arrogance from a bit of a different angle which makes the following assumption:
 - 2. If God broke some of the natural branches off (*His chosen people*), and in doing so made room for wild olive branches which He then grafted in (*believing Gentiles*), then by implication it means that the ones broken off are worthless and the ones grafted in must be worthy of being grafted in.
 - 3. The problem with this assumption is that it implies there is something the Gentile believers have, or have done, to make themselves worthy of replacing the unworthy, unbelieving Jews. Now if you were thinking this kind of arrogance was only a problem among the Jews, think again, for it is a human nature problem that can entice any of us into its way of thinking. Now to this assumption, Paul replies –

- E. Romans 11:20-21 . . . Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; [21] for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either.
1. Paul begins his answer by agreeing that the Jews who were broken off were diseased, and the cause of their sickness was unbelief.
 2. Then Paul makes it clear that we Gentiles have been grafted in and are still attached because we are living by faith.
 - a. In other words, we have not been grafted in, and we are not still attached because of something we have done to make ourselves worthy. We are part of the cultivated olive tree only because of our faith.
 - b. This should come as no surprise because we know there is nothing we have or can do to put God in our debt any more than the Jews have been able to put God in their debt.
 - c. And there is nothing we have or can obtain to put ourselves in the position whereby we can decide for God who He justifies any more than the Jews could obtain a standing with God whereby they could decide who God justifies.
 - d. The reality is, unlike the Jews, who have Abraham as their father, and who were given the Law, the Temple, and the seal of circumcision, all that we Gentiles can bring to God is our faith, that is, a faith that believes in the redeeming work of Jesus Christ and that results in a life of faithful obedience.
 3. Of course, in reality, faith is all that any of us can bring to God, for as Paul said in Romans 5 . . . [1] Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, [2] through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. [6] For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. [9] And having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. [18] So then as through one transgression (*Adam*) there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness (*Jesus Christ*) there resulted justification of life to all men. [19] For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.
 4. The point of all this is that since there is nothing we have or can do to pay our own sin debt in order to gain eternal life, and since it is God in Christ who purchased our salvation and who makes us righteous, we have been grafted into God through Jesus Christ, and

we remain healthy branches only by faith and the resulting life of faithful obedience.

5. The next thing Paul does is state the essence of his warning to us Gentile believers – and the warning goes like this: do not be conceited (*that is, do not think you are so worthy or so important to God that He would never cut you off*), but fear (*or as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:12, let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall*). And why fear? Because if God did not spare the natural branches (*because of falling back into unbelief*), He will not spare you, either.
 - a. Though Peter used different imagery, he said the same thing in 2 Peter 2:20-22 . . . For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. [21] For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. [22] It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A dog returns to its own vomit," and, "A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire."
 - b. In other words, if the natural branches do not have the kind of standing with God whereby they can live in unbelief and still be justified (*not broken off*), then we Gentile believers can be sure we are no safer from God's judgment than they. Then Paul says:

F. Romans 11:22 . . . Behold then (*that is, take notice of, or give serious attention to*) the kindness (*generosity, goodness, gentleness, and sympathy, which includes mercy and forgiveness*), and severity (*extreme strictness or harshness in dealing out punishment for wrong doing*) of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.

1. We see in the beginning of this verse that the kindness and severity of God are a unified whole. In other words, they go hand-in-hand as if they are inseparable. And this is to the advantage of the righteous, that is, of all who treasure righteousness, and who pursue righteousness with their whole-heart, and who are deemed righteous by God.
2. But just how is the inseparableness of God's kindness and severity an advantage? It is through their working together that righteousness can grow in us and ultimately prevail for eternity. It is through their working together that evil will be completely cast out and the devil

removed. It is through their working together that believers will one day be like Christ and the believer's eternal home will be totally free from all unrighteousness and all its destructive results.

3. The next thing in this verse that should get our attention is the "conditional if" regarding remaining in God's kindness, or remaining grafted in the olive tree. According to this portion of scripture, being grafted in is not a guarantee of remaining grafted in.
 - a. According to what Paul says, we will remain grafted in, "if" or "on the condition that" we continue in the kindness of God.
 - b. And how do we continue in the kindness of God? The most obvious answer based on the context is by doing the opposite of those who are cut off.
 - c. Now if branches are cut off for their unbelief, then we will remain grafted in on the condition that we continue living a life of faith that expresses itself in faithful obedience.
 - d. Jesus stated a similar truth in Matthew 24:10-13 . . . At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. [11] Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. [12] Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. [13] But the one who endures to the end (*remains faithful to the end*), he will be saved.
4. Paul concludes this verse by reminding us that those who fell back into unbelief experienced the severity of God while those who continued to live a life of faith continued to experience the kindness of God. So don't be foolish or arrogant, for that results in getting cut off. Be wise and humble – continue to live a life of faith and faithful obedience.

III. Conclusion

- A. Paul concludes his warning by making it clear that with God, final is not final until we have passed from this life into the next. As long as we have the ability in this life to repent, confess, and return to a life of faith, we can come back to God, find mercy and grace, and be grafted in again to the living tree that gives life eternal to all who are part of it.
- B. Romans 11:23-24 . . . And they also (*unbelieving Jews*), if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. [24] For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?