

The Book of Romans, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 11: Israel, the Remnant, and the Riches of God's Mercy

Romans 11:1-36

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Romans 11 completes Paul's three-chapter meditation on Israel, and like Lesson 10 it requires real care and confidence, because it stands in the middle of contested doctrines. Paul's main point is hopeful: God has not rejected His people. There is a remnant chosen by grace; Israel's stumble has opened salvation to the Gentiles; and God's mercy is still extended to Israel through the gospel. Paul drives home a sustained warning against Gentile arrogance using the image of the olive tree, and he ends in a doxology to the unsearchable wisdom of God. The teacher should be ready to handle two doctrinally sensitive matters with clarity: the conditional nature of our standing (the branches broken off and grafted in) and the meaning of all Israel will be saved.

First, the olive tree passage (11:16-24) is one of the clearest texts in Scripture on the conditional security of the believer, and the teacher should let it speak plainly. Natural branches were broken off because of unbelief; wild branches were grafted in through faith; and Paul warns the grafted-in branches that they too will be cut off if they do not continue in God's kindness. This directly contradicts the doctrine of once saved, always saved and the Calvinistic perseverance of the saints understood as an unconditional guarantee. Belonging to the people of God is by faith, and it is sustained by continuing in faith. At the same time, Paul holds out hope: God is able to graft the fallen back in if they do not continue in unbelief. The teacher should present this as a sober and hopeful truth, against presumption and against despair, calling believers to ongoing, living faith.

Second, the phrase all Israel will be saved (11:26) must be handled carefully to guard against the premillennial scheme. The teacher should make clear what Paul is and is not promising. Paul is not promising a future earthly national or political restoration of the nation of Israel, nor a thousand-year earthly reign centered on a rebuilt Jewish kingdom. The whole argument of these chapters is that salvation comes only through faith in Christ and the gospel; Israelites are saved exactly as Gentiles are, by being grafted back in through faith, not through a separate national covenant. Faithful interpreters differ on the precise meaning of all Israel will be saved (some understand it as the full company of God's people, believing Jews and Gentiles together, the true Israel saved throughout this age; others as a large future turning of ethnic Jews to Christ through the gospel before the end). The teacher need not be dogmatic between these, but should firmly exclude any reading that expects a restored earthly Israelite kingdom or a salvation apart from the gospel of Christ. The kingdom of God is the reign of Christ now, entered through the gospel; there is no future earthly national restoration of Israel to anticipate.

Likewise, the teacher should guard against double predestination: God has not permanently and unconditionally cast off Israel or anyone, and His desire is mercy on all.

This chapter is also richly formative. Its sustained warning against pride and presumption speaks directly to long-time, well-taught believers who can grow arrogant or complacent. Its call to continue in God's kindness summons us to ongoing, living faith rather than coasting on the past. And its closing doxology models the worship that should crown all our theology. The disciple being formed here is a person humbled out of all spiritual pride, soberly committed to continuing in faith, grateful for undeserved mercy, and moved to worship before the unsearchable wisdom of God.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul asks whether God has rejected His people, and answers emphatically that He has not, pointing to himself as an Israelite and to the remnant chosen by grace, just as in Elijah's day God kept seven thousand for Himself (11:1-6). What does this passage teach about God's faithfulness to His promises and the existence of a faithful remnant, and what does it mean that this remnant is chosen by grace and not by works?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul asks the question that has been building: has God rejected His people? His answer is emphatic: By no means! (11:1). The teacher should help students feel the relief and the faithfulness of God in this answer. God's covenant love does not evaporate because of human unbelief.

Note Paul's first piece of evidence: himself. I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham (11:1). The very existence of believing Jews like Paul proves God has not cast off His people. Then Paul reaches for Elijah, who thought he stood alone, and God's reply that He had kept seven thousand faithful (11:2-4). God always preserves a remnant.

Define the remnant and its basis. Paul says there is at the present time a remnant, chosen by grace (11:5). The remnant are those who have received the gospel by faith, and they belong to God by grace, not by works (11:6). This keeps the chapter consistent with everything Paul has taught: salvation is by grace, received through faith, and the remnant is made up of believers, not the self-righteous.

Apply it to God's faithfulness. The existence of the remnant shows that God's word has not failed and His promises stand. Even when the majority turns away, God preserves a faithful people. The teacher can help students trust a God whose purposes are never defeated by widespread unbelief, and who always has His faithful ones, even when they are hard to see.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's faithfulness, He has not rejected His people (11:1-2)
- The remnant chosen by grace, made up of believers (11:5)
- Grace and works as opposites in the basis of salvation (11:6)
- God always preserving a faithful remnant (Elijah and the seven thousand)

Discussion Prompts

- How does the existence of a remnant show that God's word has not failed?
- What does it mean that the remnant is chosen by grace and not by works?
- How does this passage strengthen your trust in God's faithfulness?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul recalls Elijah, who thought he was the only faithful one left, and God's reply that He had kept seven thousand (11:2-4). Have you ever felt that you were one of the few still trying to be faithful, that the faithful are disappearing around you? How does it encourage you that God always preserves a faithful remnant, and what is your part in remaining among them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question takes the Elijah story (11:2-4) and applies it to the discouragement believers feel when faithfulness seems rare. The teacher should help students find both comfort and responsibility in God's preserved remnant.

Name the Elijah feeling. Many faithful believers, especially in times of cultural drift, feel as Elijah did: that they are among the last ones still trying to follow God, that the faithful are vanishing, that they stand nearly alone. This feeling is real and can be deeply discouraging.

Bring God's corrective. God told Elijah his perception was wrong; there were seven thousand he knew nothing about. God always has more faithful people than we can see. This is meant to encourage the discouraged believer: you are not as alone as you feel, and God is preserving His people even where you cannot perceive it.

Add the note of responsibility. The remnant is not preserved passively; the seven thousand were those who had not bowed to Baal. Our part is to remain among the faithful, refusing to bow to the idols of our age, continuing in faith. Encourage students to take heart that they are not alone, and to resolve to be counted among the faithful remnant, perhaps by drawing closer to other believers who will strengthen them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The discouragement of feeling like the last faithful one
- God preserving more faithful people than we can see
- The remnant as those who refuse to bow to the idols of the age

- Our responsibility to remain among the faithful

Discussion Prompts

- Have you ever felt like one of the few still trying to be faithful?
- How does it encourage you that God always preserves a remnant?
- What is your part in remaining among the faithful?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul explains that Israel's stumble was not the end: through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous, and their rejection has meant riches for the world (11:11-15). How does this passage reveal God's surprising wisdom in weaving even Israel's unbelief into His larger saving purpose for the whole world?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul reveals God's surprising wisdom: through Israel's trespass, salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous (11:11). Their stumble was not a permanent fall but became, in God's hands, the occasion for riches to the whole world (11:12). The teacher should help students marvel at how God weaves even unbelief into His saving purpose.

Trace the logic. Israel's rejection of the gospel led the apostles to turn to the Gentiles, and the gospel spread to the nations. So the very stumbling of Israel opened the door for the world. God did not cause Israel's unbelief, but He sovereignly used it to advance His plan, bringing good out of failure.

Note the purpose of provoking jealousy. Paul says the inclusion of the Gentiles is meant to make Israel jealous (11:11, 14), to stir them to desire what they see their Gentile neighbors enjoying in Christ, so that some of them too might be saved. God's purpose toward Israel remains gracious even in their hardening; He is still working toward their salvation.

Apply it to trust in God's wisdom. This passage teaches that God can bring immense good even out of human failure and rejection. The teacher can help students trust that God is never at a loss, that He weaves even the dark threads of human sin into a design of mercy. This is the same God who works all things together for good (Romans 8:28), now seen on the scale of nations.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's wisdom in using Israel's stumble to bring salvation to the Gentiles (11:11-12)
- God bringing good out of human failure without causing the failure
- The provoking of jealousy as part of God's continued grace toward Israel
- Trusting God's wisdom to weave even rejection into His saving plan

Discussion Prompts

- How did Israel's stumble become an occasion for the world's blessing?
- What does it mean that God meant to provoke Israel to jealousy?
- How does this passage deepen your trust in God's wisdom?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul reminds the Gentile believers that the riches of salvation came to them through God's mercy, not their merit (11:11–12, 30–31). If you came to Christ as an outsider to the original covenant people, brought in purely by grace, how does remembering that you were once far off and brought near guard you against taking your salvation for granted?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question takes the truth that Gentile believers were brought in purely by mercy (11:11–12, 30–31) and presses it into the heart. The teacher should help students who came to Christ as outsiders feel the wonder of their inclusion.

Recall the outsider status. Most believers today are Gentiles, originally outside the covenant people, with no natural claim on the promises. Paul will say in Ephesians that we were once separated, alienated, strangers, without hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12). We were brought near entirely by mercy, not merit.

Guard against taking grace for granted. Those who have been believers a long time, or who grew up in the church, can lose the wonder of their inclusion and begin to feel entitled, as though God were fortunate to have them. Remembering that we were once far off and brought near purely by grace restores humility and gratitude.

Apply it to daily posture. A believer who remembers they were brought in by mercy holds their salvation with open, grateful hands rather than a sense of entitlement. They are slow to look down on others and quick to thank God. Invite students to recall their own before, what their life and standing were apart from Christ, and to let that memory rekindle gratitude this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Gentile believers brought near by mercy, once far off (Ephesians 2:11–13)
- Guarding against entitlement and taking grace for granted
- Remembering our before as a means of gratitude and humility
- Holding salvation with grateful rather than entitled hands

Discussion Prompts

- How does remembering you were once an outsider brought in by grace affect you?

- Where have you begun to take your salvation for granted?
- What would it look like to recover the wonder of being brought near?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul gives the image of the olive tree: some natural branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among them and now share in the nourishing root, contrary to nature and by grace (11:16–24). What does the olive tree teach about the one people of God, about how branches are broken off and grafted in, and about the basis on which anyone belongs to the tree?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul gives the central image of the chapter: the olive tree (11:16–24). There is one tree, one people of God, rooted in the promises to the patriarchs. Natural branches (unbelieving Israel) were broken off, and wild branches (believing Gentiles) were grafted in. The teacher should unfold what this rich image teaches.

Establish the oneness of the tree. There are not two peoples of God, one for Jews and one for Gentiles, but one tree, one people, into which believing Gentiles are grafted alongside believing Jews. This is crucial against any scheme that runs a separate program for ethnic Israel. The people of God is one olive tree, and one belongs to it the same way regardless of background.

Explain breaking off and grafting in. Natural branches were broken off because of unbelief; wild branches were grafted in through faith (11:20). The principle is consistent throughout: belonging to the tree is by faith, and unbelief severs a branch from it. Heritage does not secure a branch (the natural branches were broken off), and lack of heritage does not bar one (the wild branches were grafted in). Faith is the deciding factor.

Stress the basis: grace and the supporting root. Paul reminds the Gentiles that they do not support the root; the root supports them (11:18). We do not sustain our own place in the tree; we are sustained by the root, by God's gracious covenant and Christ Himself. The grafting in of wild branches is contrary to nature (11:24), a pure act of grace. The teacher should help students see that everyone in the tree is there by grace, received through faith, and depends entirely on the root.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- One olive tree, one people of God, not two separate programs (11:16–17)
- Branches broken off through unbelief and grafted in through faith (11:20)
- Heritage neither securing nor barring a place in the tree; faith is decisive
- The root supporting the branches, everyone in the tree by grace (11:18, 24)

Discussion Prompts

- What does the olive tree teach about the oneness of God's people?
- On what basis are branches broken off or grafted in?
- What does it mean that the root supports you and not the reverse?

Question 6

Student Question:

Paul warns the grafted-in branches, Do not be arrogant toward the branches; remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you (11:18–20). Where might spiritual pride be quietly growing in you, perhaps looking down on others who are struggling, or feeling secure because of your knowledge or record? What would genuine humility before God look like in that area?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question takes Paul's warning against arrogance (11:18–20) and turns it on the student's own heart. The teacher should help the class detect the subtle forms spiritual pride takes, especially in mature believers.

Name the danger. Paul warns the grafted-in branches: Do not be arrogant. Spiritual pride is a peculiar danger for those who have been blessed, taught, and long established in the faith. It can show up as looking down on those who are struggling, feeling secure because of our knowledge or record, or quietly congratulating ourselves on our faithfulness.

Expose its subtlety. Spiritual pride rarely announces itself; it hides behind orthodoxy and discipline. The very people most blessed with truth are often most tempted to feel superior. Paul's warning to the Gentiles, who had received so much, is a warning to every well-taught believer not to mistake God's gifts for personal merit.

Move toward humility. Genuine humility remembers that we stand only by grace through faith, that the root supports us and not the reverse, and that we are no better than those who struggle. Invite students to identify where pride is quietly growing, perhaps a person or group they look down on, and to replace contempt with the humility that says, there but for the grace of God go I.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spiritual pride as a particular danger for the blessed and well-taught
- The subtlety of pride hiding behind orthodoxy and discipline
- Humility grounded in standing only by grace through faith
- Replacing contempt for strugglers with grace-shaped humility

Discussion Prompts

- Where might spiritual pride be quietly growing in you?
- Why are well-taught, long-established believers especially tempted to arrogance?
- What would genuine humility look like in that area of your life?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul says to consider the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who fell, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in His kindness; otherwise you too will be cut off (11:22). What does this passage teach about both the kindness and the severity of God, and what does it mean that our continuing in His kindness is the condition for remaining among His people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul calls us to consider the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who fell, kindness toward you, provided you continue in His kindness; otherwise you too will be cut off (11:22). This is one of the clearest statements in Scripture on the conditional nature of our standing, and the teacher should let it speak plainly.

Hold both attributes together. God is kind, and God is severe. Our age likes to speak only of His kindness, but Paul insists we behold both. The same God who graciously grafted in the Gentiles really did break off the unbelieving branches. To ignore His severity is to misunderstand Him and to grow careless.

Explain the condition. Paul says God's kindness continues toward us provided we continue in His kindness. Our place in the tree is not unconditionally guaranteed regardless of how we live; it is sustained as we continue in faith. The teacher should clearly connect this to the doctrinal boundary: this verse contradicts the idea of once saved, always saved. A branch genuinely in the tree can be cut off if it does not continue in faith.

Keep it hopeful as well as sober. The warning is real, but it is not despairing. Continuing in God's kindness is not an anxious striving to earn what we already have; it is simply remaining in the living faith by which we were grafted in, abiding in Christ as a branch abides in the vine (John 15). And Paul immediately adds that God is able to graft back in even those who were cut off, if they do not continue in unbelief (11:23). So the message is: do not presume, do not despair, but continue in His kindness. The teacher should help students hold the kindness and severity of God together, leading neither to fear nor to complacency but to faithful continuance.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The kindness and the severity of God held together (11:22)
- Continuing in God's kindness as the condition of remaining in the tree
- This passage against once saved, always saved (unconditional eternal security)

- Continuance as abiding in living faith, not anxious earning (John 15)
- God's ability to graft back in those who turn from unbelief (11:23)

Discussion Prompts

- What does this passage teach about both the kindness and severity of God?
- What does it mean that we must continue in His kindness?
- How does this verse address the idea of once saved, always saved?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul plainly warns that those grafted in by faith can be cut off if they do not continue in faith (11:20–22). This challenges any idea that we can coast on a past decision while drifting away in the present. Are you actively continuing in God's kindness, or quietly presuming on it? What is one way you can renew and deepen your faith this week rather than taking it for granted?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question takes the warning that branches can be cut off (11:20–22) and presses it into honest self-examination. The teacher should help students distinguish a living, continuing faith from a faith they are merely coasting on.

Confront the coasting mentality. Many believers rest on a decision or an experience in the past, assuming their present drift does not matter. Paul's warning makes this impossible. We were grafted in by faith, and we remain only as we continue in faith. A faith that is not being actively renewed and lived is a faith in danger of withering.

Distinguish presumption from assurance. True assurance rests on God's faithfulness while continuing in faith; presumption claims the security without the continuing. The believer who presumes assumes they are safe no matter how they live; the believer who continues keeps abiding in Christ, walking in faith and obedience. Help students discern which describes them honestly.

Move toward renewal. The remedy for coasting is not anxiety but a fresh, active engagement with Christ: returning to the word, to prayer, to the assembly, to obedience, to the Lord's Supper, to the means by which faith is fed and kept alive. Invite students to name one concrete way they will renew and deepen their faith this week rather than presuming on it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The danger of coasting on past faith while drifting in the present
- The difference between presumption and true assurance
- Continuing in faith as active abiding, not passive resting
- Renewing faith through the means God has given

Discussion Prompts

- Are you actively continuing in God's kindness, or quietly presuming on it?
- What is the difference between assurance and presumption?
- What is one way you can renew and deepen your faith this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul reveals a mystery: a partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, and in this way all Israel will be saved, for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable, and God has consigned all to disobedience that He may have mercy on all (11:25–32). What is Paul teaching about God's ongoing mercy toward Israel and about salvation coming through the gospel; why must we understand all Israel will be saved as God's mercy gathering His people through faith in Christ rather than as a promise of a future earthly national or political restoration of Israel; and how does this passage guard us against both the idea that God has permanently and unconditionally cast off any people and the premillennial expectation of a restored earthly Israelite kingdom?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal question of the lesson, and the teacher should handle it with both confidence and care, because it touches two errors at once: double predestination on one side and premillennialism on the other. Paul reveals a mystery: a partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, and in this way all Israel will be saved (11:25–26).

Begin with what is clear and central. Throughout these three chapters Paul has insisted that salvation comes only through faith in Christ and the gospel. Israelites are saved exactly as Gentiles are, by being grafted back into the one olive tree through faith (11:23). Whatever all Israel will be saved means, it cannot mean a salvation by some separate route apart from the gospel of Christ. This is the fixed point that governs the whole interpretation.

Address the meaning of all Israel will be saved, noting the range of faithful views without dogmatism. Some understand all Israel as the full company of God's people, believing Jews and believing Gentiles together, the true Israel of God gathered throughout this age (compare Galatians 6:16). Others understand it as a large future turning of ethnic Jews to Christ through the gospel before the end, as the gospel continues to go out. The teacher need not settle this with certainty. What matters is that on either reading, salvation is through faith in Christ, by being grafted back into the one tree.

Now firmly exclude the premillennial misreading, since this is a stated doctrinal boundary. This passage does not promise a future earthly national or political restoration of the nation of Israel, nor a rebuilt Jewish kingdom, nor a thousand-year earthly reign of Christ centered on national

Israel. Such schemes read into Paul an earthly, political hope that the chapter never teaches and that the rest of the New Testament excludes. The kingdom of God is the reign of Christ, established when His church began and entered now through the gospel (Daniel 2:44; Mark 9:1; Colossians 1:13). Christ reigns now from the right hand of the Father. There is no future earthly national restoration of Israel to anticipate; there is only the ongoing mercy of God gathering His people, Jew and Gentile, through faith in Christ.

Address the other boundary as well. Paul says the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable (11:29) and that God has consigned all to disobedience that He may have mercy on all (11:32). This guards against double predestination: God has not permanently and unconditionally cast off Israel or anyone. His posture toward all, Jew and Gentile, is mercy. He hardened in part, but with a view to mercy; He broke off branches, but stands ready to graft them back in. The God of these chapters is not a God who arbitrarily damns, but a God whose deepest purpose is to have mercy on all who will come to Him in faith.

Close on the wonder of God's mercy. The teacher should help students see that Paul's point in this mystery is the breathtaking scope and wisdom of God's mercy, which has bound Jew and Gentile together so that all might receive mercy through the same gospel. This is why Paul bursts into worship in the next verses. The right response is not a speculative timeline but humble adoration of the depth of the riches and wisdom of God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Salvation only through faith in Christ and the gospel, for Israel and Gentile alike (11:23)
- All Israel will be saved understood as God's mercy gathering His people through faith, not a separate route
- The range of faithful views (the one people of God; a future turning of ethnic Jews through the gospel), without dogmatism
- Firm rejection of the premillennial scheme, no future earthly national or political restoration of Israel
- The kingdom as the present reign of Christ entered through the gospel (Daniel 2:44; Mark 9:1; Colossians 1:13)
- The irrevocable gifts and calling of God and mercy on all (11:29, 32), guarding against double predestination
- God's deepest purpose as mercy, not arbitrary rejection

Discussion Prompts

- Why must all Israel will be saved be understood as salvation through the gospel rather than a separate national restoration?
- How does this passage exclude the premillennial expectation of a future earthly Israelite kingdom?
- How do verses 29 and 32 guard against the idea that God has permanently cast off any people?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across this chapter, which ends in Paul falling on his face in worship: O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! (11:33–36). Paul has shown you the faithful remnant, God’s surprising mercy, the olive tree, the warning against pride, and the riches of God’s mercy to all. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from Romans 11:1–36 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question invites students to look back across the chapter, which ends in worship, and name how Jesus is forming them through it. The teacher should gather the threads and lead the class toward the same adoration with which Paul ends.

Recall the journey: God’s faithfulness and the remnant chosen by grace, His surprising wisdom in using Israel’s stumble to bless the world, the one olive tree, the sober warning against pride and presumption, the call to continue in God’s kindness, and the riches of God’s mercy extended to all.

Encourage a single takeaway. For one it may be encouragement that they are not alone among the faithful; for another, humbling out of a subtle spiritual pride; for another, a renewed, active faith in place of coasting; for another, fresh wonder at the mercy that brought them in.

Close in worship, as Paul does. The chapter ends, O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things (11:33–36). The disciple being formed here is a person humbled out of pride, sobered into continuing faith, grateful for mercy, and moved, like Paul, to fall on their face in worship before the unsearchable wisdom of God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Worship as the proper crown of theology (11:33–36)
- Humility, continuing faith, and gratitude as fruits of the chapter
- The riches of God’s mercy to all who come by faith
- Spiritual formation that ends in adoration of God

Discussion Prompts

- Which single truth from Romans 11:1–36 most needs to shape your week?
- Has this chapter humbled you, encouraged you, or both, and how?
- What would it look like for your study of these truths to end, like Paul’s, in worship?