

The Book of Romans

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

11:1-36

There is a moment in the life of the prophet Elijah when, exhausted and afraid, he tells God he is the only faithful person left. I alone am left, he says, and they seek my life. And God gently corrects him: I have kept for Myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Elijah's eyes had deceived him. Things were not as hopeless as they looked. Paul reaches back to that very story in Romans 11, because the question on the table is whether God has finally given up on Israel. Most of the nation has rejected the Messiah. Has God rejected them in return? Paul's answer is immediate and emphatic. By no means! I myself am an Israelite. God has not abandoned His people; even now there is a remnant, chosen by grace.

This is the third and final movement of Paul's long meditation on Israel, and the tone begins to lift toward hope and ends in soaring praise. Paul wants the mostly Gentile church in Rome to understand something important and to hold a humble posture because of it. Israel's stumble was not the end of the story. In God's surprising wisdom, their rejection of the gospel opened the door wide for the Gentiles to be brought in. And the inclusion of the Gentiles is, in turn, meant to provoke Israel to jealousy, to make them long for what they see their Gentile neighbors enjoying, so that they too might return.

To picture all this, Paul gives us the image of an olive tree. There is one tree, one people of God, rooted in the promises to the patriarchs. Some natural branches, unbelieving Israel, were broken off. And wild branches, believing Gentiles, were grafted in among them, contrary to nature, by sheer grace. Then Paul turns and points his finger straight at any Gentile believer tempted to feel superior: Do not be arrogant toward the branches. You do not support the root; the root supports you. They were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. The same God who did not spare the natural branches will not spare you either if you do not continue in His kindness.

That warning is the beating heart of this chapter for our own lives. We stand by faith, and we continue to stand only as we continue in faith. There is no room for presumption, and no room for despair either, because the God who broke off branches is also able to graft them back in. Paul ends not with a tidy formula but with worship, falling on his face before the wisdom of God: O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! Read this chapter and let it do two things: humble you out of every trace of pride, and lift you into wonder at the mercy of a God who has bound all things together so that He might have mercy on all.

Group Discussion: Paul warns the Gentile believers not to become arrogant, reminding them that they stand only by faith and were grafted in by grace, and that they must continue in God's kindness or be cut off (11:17-22). Why is spiritual pride such a danger for people who have been

blessed by God, and how can a congregation guard against the arrogance and presumption Paul warns against here?

Personal Reflection: Paul says that you, the believer, stand fast only through faith, and he adds, do not become proud, but fear, and continue in His kindness (11:20–22). Examine your own heart: are you tending toward presumption, taking your standing with God for granted, or are you continuing in His kindness through ongoing, living faith? Where do you most need to renew your faith rather than coast on it?

Read Romans 11:1–36

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?

8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: 1 Kings 19:9–18, Elijah and the seven thousand God preserved; Galatians 6:15–16 and Galatians 3:28–29, the Israel of God and being Abraham's offspring through Christ; Ephesians 2:11–22, Gentiles once far off brought near and made one new people; John 15:1–8, abiding in the vine and branches that do not abide; Romans 11:33–36, the doxology to the depth of God's wisdom