

Romans Part 2

How to be a Christian without Being Religious!

Lesson 6: All Israel Will Be Saved!?! (Romans 11:17-36)

HORTICULTURE—THE OLIVE TREE

John Stott writes,

The olive, cultivated in groves or orchards throughout Palestine, was an accepted emblem of Israel [Jer. 11:16; Hosea 14:6], as was also the vine [Ps. 80:8ff.]. Paul now develops the metaphor in such a way as to accommodate and illustrate his teaching about Jews and Gentiles. The cultivated olive is the people of God, whose root is the patriarchs and whose stem represents the continuity of the centuries. Now some of the branches have been broken off, standing for the unbelieving Jews who have been temporarily discarded, and you (Gentile believers), though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others (the Jewish remnant), so that you now share with them in the nourishing sap from the olive root (verse 17).¹⁶

Paul begins to first use the olive tree and its branches as an analogy to explain the relationship between Israel (the Jews) and believing Gentiles in verses 17-21. We always need to be careful not to take an analogy or a metaphor too far. Like a parable, these are normally used to make one or two clear biblical truths. I would look at this analogy—the olive tree—like this:

- The olive tree represents the people of God
- The root represents the Patriarchs of Israel (Romans 9:4-5)
- The natural branches represent individual Jews
- The wild olive shoots represent believing Gentiles

Paul writes in verses 17-21:

If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

¹⁶ Stott, 299.

Think of all that God has given to the world that originated with the Patriarchs of Israel (The line of men God used to establish the nation of Israel: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jacob's 12 sons). From them came the law, the temple worship, the promises of God, "and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ" (Romans 9:5). All Gentile believers—in fact, the whole Christian church—should and must recognize that it is supported by this root, the Patriarchs of Israel. Thus, in humility, the Church should appreciate and highly cherish its Jewish roots. The root supports the Church! We have a Jewish Bible and Jewish Messiah. Thus, there is no room for arrogance on the part of believing Gentiles.

The only reason there is room among the natural branches for wild olive shoots (believing Gentiles) to be grafted in is because of the "broken off" branches—the non-believing Jews. Those Jews who refused to believe lost their place among the other branches, and thus, are not a part of the true family of God. Paul writes in Romans 2:28-29, "A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code." Moreover, in Romans 9:8 Paul writes, "In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring."

Physical descendants of Abraham (Jews) lost their place in the family of God (the olive tree) because of their unbelief. And the only reason a Gentile is grafted in is because of God's grace and the believer's faith, which is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8-9). Our inclusion in the family of God has nothing to do with our religious ceremonies, traditions and so-called "good deeds." Paul teaches that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. It's that simple. And it is the same for both Jews and Gentiles.

Paul continues in verses 22-24:

Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their olive tree.

God is stern and will be stern towards those who refuse to receive His grace and mercy. He has no choice. He cannot tolerate sin and rebellion because He is holy and righteous. Furthermore, He is a jealous God who longs for and even demands our worship. Now, consider all that the Jews have endured due to their lack of belief as evidenced by their disobedience:

- The fall of Samaria and the Assyrian captivity (722 B.C.)
- The destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity (586 B.C.)

- The burning of the temple and the destruction of Jerusalem, again, under the Romans, which led to their worldwide dispersion (70 A.D.)
- And, finally the Holocaust under Adolf Hitler (1933-1945)

God's wrath is something to be feared, but it is important to understand that His wrath flows from His love and is always directed at evil. How do you avoid God's wrath? Believe! John 3:36 states, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." Paul writes about God's wrath in Romans 1:18, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness."

On the other hand, consider the kindness of God. The kindness of God is meant to woo men and women to Himself. Romans 2:4 states, "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?" When men and women refuse to believe, they will face God's wrath. Romans 2:5 continues, "But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed." The good news is that we still are living in the day of grace; therefore, both Jews and Gentiles still have the opportunity to receive God's gift of kindness—His grace and mercy. Belief is the key that opens the door to God's kindness.

Understand that once a man or woman receives the gift of eternal life, it can never be rescinded. It is not only permanent but also both a present- and future-tense possession. Thus when Paul, in essence, says that if you do not continue in His kindness you will be cut off, this does not mean that you will lose your salvation. Not continuing in God's kindness simply means that there never was real belief.

Keller writes,

We must not pit this kind of exhortation against 8:30 ("those he justified, he also glorified") and the many other passages where Paul insists we are safe in God's love.

1 John 2:19 says, "They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us." There is no talk of "losing salvation" here, only of the revelation of counterfeits. Hebrews 3:14-15 is similar: "We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. As has just been said: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...' " If we have faith in Christ Jesus, we can be assured; but we must never be arrogant.¹⁷

¹⁷ Keller, 95.

ALL ISRAEL WILL BE SAVED

What does the future hold for the nearly 14 million Jews around the world? Is God finished with them? No! Paul has already attested to this biblical truth. God made countless promises to Abraham concerning his descendants, and God will never forget His word. Jews can be grafted back into the olive tree. All that is required is true faith. Grafting into the tree comes by grace through faith. This is true for both Jews and Gentiles. So, what does the future hold for the Jews? Paul continues in verses 25-27,

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:

“The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.

And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”

What does the future hold for Israel (the Jews)? Salvation! Forgiveness! Engrafting! Since the day of Pentecost, the gospel has been primarily going to the Gentiles. And Paul was the main man tasked with carrying the gospel to Gentiles. Even today, the gospel continues to go forth among the Gentiles. In the Middle East, hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Muslims (Gentiles) are coming to faith in Christ Jesus. At some point in the future, and only God knows when, the “full number of Gentiles [will have] come in.” Then, the gospel will go forth to the nation of Israel and to the scattered Jews around the world. How exactly will this happen? Only the Lord knows. The prophet Zechariah seems to address this outpouring of the gospel to Israel in Zechariah 13:1, “On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.”

When the Jews believe *en masse*, this will bring a great blessing to the world and perhaps even usher in the return of our glorious Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Again, only He knows. Meanwhile, the gospel continues to go forth among the Gentiles.

Caution: the phrase “All Israel will be saved” does not mean that every Jew will be saved.

Keller explains,

How many will be saved? What does the word “all” mean in verse 26? “All Israel” probably does not mean every Jew without exception, F.F. Bruce explains: “‘All Israel’ is a recurring expression in Jewish literature, where it need not mean ‘every Jew without a single exception’ but ‘Israel as a whole.’”

Likely, it means a great mass of the Jewish people. That is how the word “Israel” is used through the rest of the chapter. Paul often uses it to refer to the majority of Israel over and against the minority of believing Jews. That is, though he himself is part of Israel ethnically, he does not include himself when he speaks of “Israel” rejecting the gospel.¹⁸

Paul continues in verses 28-32,

As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God’s mercy to you. For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

God chose Israel to be His special people. Currently, they are experiencing a hardening, in part. Some Jews do believe that Jesus is their Messiah. However, the vast majority remains hardened in their unbelief. But God is not finished. God’s gifts and His call are irrevocable. Eventually, God’s purpose will be fulfilled in His chosen people. By what means will the Jews “be grafted into their own olive tree” (verse 24)? By election and mercy. Election and mercy are the means by which all men and women are grafted into the olive tree (the family of God)! “For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all” (verse 32). Verse 32 summarizes God’s plan and purpose for the world. First, understand that this verse does not mean that all people will eventually be saved. By itself, it seems to imply this, but taking the verse out of context leads to erroneous interpretation. Thus, we should never to take a verse out of context. We must view any particular verse in the context of the chapter, the book, and even the entire Bible to truly understand its meaning.

Stott explains this verse as follows:

Disobedience is likened to a dungeon in which God has incarcerated all human beings, so that ‘they have no possibility of escape except as God’s mercy releases them.’ (Cranfield, vol. II, p. 587.) This has been the argument of this letter, as in its first three chapters Paul demonstrated that all human beings are sinful, guilty and without excuse, and then from 3:21 onwards unfolded the way of salvation by grace through faith in Christ... Thus human disobedience is the prison from which divine mercy liberates us.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid., 97.

¹⁹ Stott, 307.

DOXOLOGY

Paul concludes chapter 11 with this poetic doxology:

*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!*

*“Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?”
“Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?”*

For from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be the glory forever! Amen.

God is God, and we are not. Thus, we have no ground upon which to question His purposes and plans. Accordingly, Paul writes, “For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion’” (Romans 9:15). When you, whether a Jew or Gentile, realize that you have been grafted into the olive tree (the family of God), it is due to election and God’s mercy. Therefore, fall on your knees and worship Him.

DAY 1

1. Read pages 92-97 of chapter 8 from *How to Be a Christian without Being Religious* (focus on pages 96-97).
 - a. Ridenour writes, “The Lord is King.” In light of this truth, how should believers respond?
 - b. According to Ridenour, what two conditions should be evident in a true believer not only to see God but also to be a Christian without being religious?

DAY 2 Read Romans 11:17-21

2. Why were some of the branches (Jews) broken off from the olive tree (family of God)? (Verse 20)

3. Why do you think Paul refers to Gentiles as “wild olive shoots?”
4. What attribute of a Gentile facilitates his grafting into the olive tree? Use the following verse to help you with your answer:

Verse 20

John 3:16

Romans 1:16-17

Romans 3:22

Romans 4:3

Romans 5:1

Romans 9:30

Romans 10:9-10

5. Verses 20-21 state, “But they were broken off because of unbelief and you stand by faith. Do not arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.”
- a. Should we have a “healthy fear” of God (Matthew 10:28)? If so, why?
- b. Why should Gentile believers not be arrogant regarding their position in Christ?

DAY 3 Read Romans 11:22-24

6. How would you define the “sternness” and “kindness” of God? Give an example of how Jesus exemplified both of these attributes.

Sternness (See John 2:12-17)

Kindness (See John 2:1-11)

7. What do you think Paul means when he writes, “Continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off?” (See 1 John 2:19.)

8. Verse 23 states, “And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.”

- a. What do you think it means to persist in unbelief? Use the following verses to explain your answer:

Matthew 13:13-15

John 3:36

Romans 1:18-23

- b. Although Paul addresses verse 23 to the Jews, explain how Paul could just as easily address it to many, many church-going Gentile Americans.

DAY 4 Read Romans 11:25-32

9. A “mystery” in Scripture is not something that cannot be known. It is a truth that has been veiled until the proper time for it to be unveiled. The mystery of God’s plan and purpose had been veiled for centuries. But now, by divine revelation, God’s plan was unveiled to Paul. He, in turn, has unveiled God’s plan for the Jews in Romans 9, 10, and 11. Romans 11:25 is the pinnacle of this revelation: “I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of Gentiles has come in.”

a. To whom is this verse addressed, Jewish believers or Gentile believers? (Hint: *so that you may not be conceited*.)

b. Explain what Paul means:

Israel has experienced a hardening in part

Until the full number of Gentiles has come in

c. [Challenge Question] Read Joel 2:1-11; 3:1-2; Zechariah 12:10-13:1 and 13:8-9; Revelation 19:17-21. How might the future unfold for Israel in order for the Lord to remove their heart of unbelief?

10. Paul writes in verses 28-30,

As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God’s mercy to you. For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

- a. Why does Paul remind his Gentile readers that they too at one time were disobedient?

- b. Read Ephesians 2:1-5. What were we all at one time?

- c. What should our attitude be toward those who remain blind in their unbelief?

- d. How and why are any of us saved? Explain.

Election

Mercy

DAY 5 Read Romans 11:33-36

- 11. What is Paul expressing about God in these verses?

- 12. What is Paul expressing about man in these verses?

- 13. What should our attitude be when we come to something in Scripture that we don't understand?

- 14. What is the most important truth you have learned in your study of Romans 11?