

Romans
11:13-19



How Gentiles Should
Respond to Israel
and to God:
The Olive Tree Analogy

Romans

11:13a



^{13a}*Now to you I am speaking, Gentiles...*

In St. Paul's day, this letter (the Book of Romans) would have been read to the house congregations in Rome. And as they heard this section of the letter, it would have greatly caught their attention. As a matter of fact, this is the first time that St. Paul addresses the "Gentile Christians" in Rome. The placement of "*to you*" is emphatic and is a "hard break" that signals that Paul will now target a much more narrow audience...Gentiles!

INTRODUCTION:
ADDRESSING
"YOU
GENTILES"

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11:13a



13a To you now I am speaking, Gentiles...

Again, here's another example of the importance of the Greek. Paul is addressing the *“to you”* to *“all you all”* in Rome (a Second Person Plural Personal Pronoun (Ὑμῖν))! Paul will switch to the Second Person Singular Personal Pronouns in vv.17-22 and 24.

A question may arise: Why is Paul addressing only the Gentile Christians in Rome? Paul uses a rhetorical device, the allegory of the Olive Tree, to argue against Gentile boasting. Instead of Paul speaking directly concerning Israel, he turns to tell Gentile Christians how they should respond to God's reaction to the improper response of the Jews who refuse to hear the Good News.

INTRODUCTION:
ADDRESSING
“YOU
GENTILES”

Romans

11:13a



13a To you now I am speaking, Gentiles...

What we will see in this section of Chapter 11 is a stern rebuke of Gentile Christians for any and all sinful pride against Jews! Paul's purpose is to instruct and warn them (and you) from adopting an unwarranted, arrogant attitude!

INTRODUCTION:
ADDRESSING
"YOU
GENTILES"

Romans

11:13b-15



SECTION I:

PAUL'S

PERSPECTIVE—

*“An Apostle
of Gentiles”
(v. 13b-c)*

¹³ ... (as for me, then, insofar as I am an apostle of Gentiles), I glorify my ministry...

After Paul gets the Gentile Christians' attention, he validates his vantage point from which he will address them. In something of a short parenthesis, and the Greek grammar is very incomplete and weighty, though his thought is quite clear, Paul addresses his “missional” apostleship to the Gentiles. We should be careful not to think that Paul was only sent to proclaim the Gospel to only Gentiles. The conduct of Paul's ministry in Acts clearly illustrates his mission to the Jews, which also included the Gentiles, and we see the same in his epistles.

Romans

11:13b-15



SECTION I:

PAUL'S

PERSPECTIVE—

*“In Order to
Save Some
Jews” (v. 14)*

14 [so that] if, somehow, I might provoke my flesh to envy, I will also save some of them.

In Dt. 32:21, which we discussed in 10:19 and 11:11, Paul used Deuteronomy to show one way in which the “*provoking to envy (jealousy)*” takes place. These passages established that Israel was the recipient of God’s provocative action. Then Paul cites Israel here as “*my flesh.*” The word for “*flesh*” that Paul uses is from the Hebrew word “**bāśār**” (“**kindred**”). Thus, Paul in talking about Israel uses a common Hebrew word, which translates into the Greek, that literally means, “*my own flesh and blood.*” So Israel is not beyond hope, since God loved them so much (which is beyond our comprehension) that He called Gentiles for Israel’s sake, so that when the Jews saw that Gentiles were being called into the Kingdom of God, they might repent!

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SECTION I:

PAUL'S

PERSPECTIVE—

“In Order to

Save Some

Jews” (v. 14)

¹⁴ *[so that] if, somehow, I might provoke my flesh to envy, I will also save some of them.*

Paul's purpose statement follows: *“I will also save some of them.”* We must compare this statement with 1 Cor. 9:22b-23, there Paul uses comparable language. Paul has become *“all things to all”* people, including Jews and Gentiles, in order that he might save *“some of them.”* His language doesn't mean that Paul sees himself as the source of salvation; rather, it's the message that he is proclaiming, given to him by Christ Jesus. This is the eschatological reality which Paul expresses throughout Romans. We cannot limit the verb *“save”* (σώζω) by saying that Paul does the converting (cf. Rom. 10:17).

Romans

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SECTION I:

PAUL'S

PERSPECTIVE—

*“Lost and
Welcome(d)
Back” (v. 15)*

¹⁵ *Indeed, if the loss of them is reconciliation of [the] world, what [will be] the acceptance [of them] if not life from [the] dead?*

What does Paul mean by *“the loss of them?”*

The response of some in Israel who are unpersuaded and contradicting toward the Good News (cf. 10:16, 21) has been depicted actively with *“they tripped”* and *“their stumble”* (11:11-12), followed by the resulting fall (v.11), and now *“the loss of them.”* All of these expressions apply to those Jews who did not believe or listen responsively to the Word of Christ (10:16, 17). Paul is using third person pronouns in this verse that do not apply to *“all Israel”* or *“Israel as a whole.”*

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SECTION I:

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*“Lost and
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¹⁵ Indeed, if the loss of *them* is reconciliation of [the] world, what [will be] the acceptance [of *them*] if not life from [the] dead?

Instead, *“them”* refers to only those who are earnestly seeking righteousness from the *“works of the Law”*, who, therefore, did not obtain it (v.7a; 9:32). Only they in Israel were hardened (7c); tripped and stumbled (v.11); are lost and need to be received back (v.12, 15).

These unbelievers are the *“some”* whom Paul seeks to save. The fact that some of them tripped and stumbled, is not God's responsibility; nor did it happen by His initiative!

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SECTION I:

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¹⁵ *Indeed, if the loss of **them** is reconciliation of [the] world, what [will be] the acceptance [of **them**] if not life from [the] dead?*

While God reacts to an unbelieving rejection of the Gospel, and therefore, His Messiah, Jesus, on the part of some in Israel, He most emphatically does not actively push His people away from Himself (v.1-2). As you may recall, He is still holding out His hands toward them (10:21) and seeks their reconciliation and salvation.

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SECTION I: PAUL'S PERSPECTIVE— “Lost and Welcome(d) Back” (v. 15)

¹⁵ *Indeed, if the loss of them is reconciliation of [the] world, what [will be] the acceptance [of them] if not life from [the] dead?*

Reconciliation and Acceptance

Even though some in Israel have tripped and stumbled, Paul describes a positive consequence resulting from “*the loss of them*,” namely, the “*reconciliation of [the] world*.” The word, “*world*” (κόσμος), denotes the Gentiles.

Then Paul speaks of “*acceptance*” of those who had previously been lost. This Greek noun occurs only here in the NT, but Paul will employ the cognate verb “*to accept*” in Ch. 14 & 15. The noun that Paul uses is in the middle voice, which points to God actively receiving back these people to Himself. It is God accepting them into His Kingdom. Paul will later add a qualifier: *if they do not remain in unbelief*” (v.23).

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SECTION I: PAUL'S PERSPECTIVE— “Lost and Welcome(d) Back” (v. 15)

¹⁵ Indeed, if the loss of them is reconciliation of [the] world, what [will be] the acceptance [of them] if not life from [the] dead?

Life from the Dead

Lastly, Paul is even more positive as he speaks of their reception back as “*life from [the] dead.*” This is “*spiritual*” life that is granted to those who believe in Jesus as the Messiah (Christ). Life (ζωή) is a Divine gift that has an eschatological character (even when the word “*eternal*” isn’t used)! It’s the life of the New Age already experienced in this age and continuing into the New Age (for context see St. Luke 15:32).

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SECTION I:

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¹⁵ *Indeed, if the loss of them is reconciliation of [the] world, what [will be] the acceptance [of them] if not life from [the] dead?*

Life from the Dead

As a summary to this section, and prior to moving into the “analogies” section, Paul continues to speak of unbelievers in Israel as branches that have been “*cut off*” from the Olive Tree due to their unbelief (v.17, 20). He will also remind Gentiles that those same branches can be grafted back into the Olive Tree and become alive again (vv.23, 24). Therefore, the “*loss of them*” is equated with the “*dead*” at the end of v.15; and “*life*” is likened to their “*acceptance*” back into the faith and kingdom of God.

Romans

11:16-24



SECTION II:

PAUL'S

ANALOGIES -

*"Of Firstfruits
and Roots"*

(v. 16)

16 Now if the firstfruit [is] holy, also the lump; and if the root [is] holy, also the branches.

St. Paul begins this second section with the use of two analogies: Firstfruits and Roots. You will notice that Paul drops the first, so that he can fully develop the second. However, it's important that you understand what he means by "*firstfruits*." The Jewish Christians in Rome would have fully understood; the Gentile Christians may not have. This could be the reason why he doesn't fully develop this analogy and chooses to develop the roots (Olive Tree) analogy, which both Jews and Gentile would understand.

Romans

11:16-24



SECTION II: PAUL'S ANALOGIES - “Of Firstfruits and Roots” (v. 16)

16 Now if the firstfruit [is] holy, also the lump; and if the root [is] holy, also the branches.

In speaking of the “*firstfruit*,” Paul is alluding to the offering of cake from the first of the dough enjoined in Numbers 15:17-21. In the LXX (Septuagint), it does contain the phrase, “*firstfruits of the lump*,” and the offering of firstfruits of the Promised Land consecrates the rest of the land’s produce. Thus, the idea is that the consecration of the “*firstfruit*” “*lump*” extends holiness to the rest of the dough.

To further illustrate his analogy, Paul uses an example that would have been easily understood: “*if the root [is] holy, also the branches.*” What (or who) are the analogies of “*firstfruit and root*” referring? Paul answers in 11:28 – the patriarchs! Thus, firstfruit and root are pointing to the whole of the Jewish people.

Romans

11:16-24



SECTION II: PAUL'S ANALOGIES -

*"The Olive
Tree"
(v. 17-24)*

Background and Introduction

The basis of what St. Paul will be describing in this section has a foundation – God's election of grace given to Abraham! It was the great faith of Abraham in God's credited righteousness which is the *root* of Paul's analogy. God, through Abraham and the rest of the patriarchs, granted spiritual benefits to their descendants insofar as they received God's ancient promise, in faith, for those promises are bequeathed to their descendants through faith (Gal 3:26-29).

Romans

11:16-24



SECTION II: PAUL'S ANALOGIES - *"The Olive Tree"* (v. 17-24)

Background and Introduction

The blessings that were given to the patriarchs already included the promise of the engrafting of the Gentiles, and all believers, are supported and nourished by the fulfillment of those patriarchal promises in Christ Jesus, the "Seed" (cf. Gen 12:1-3; 18:18; 22:17-18; 26:3-4; 28:13-14)!

It was God's Divine Purpose that the blessings of Abraham would come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, so that they (you) might receive the promise of the Spirit through FAITH (Gal 3:14)!

Romans

11:16-24



SECTION II: PAUL'S ANALOGIES - *"The Olive Tree"* (v. 17-24)

Background and Introduction

St. Paul's extended analogy in verses 17-24 deals specifically with an olive tree, a metaphor for Israel twice in the OT (Jer 11:16 and Hosea 14:6). He then describes the engrafting process used by God on purpose, since the olive tree was the most widely cultivated tree in the Mediterranean region. Yes, Paul has been criticized by many theologians for the use of this example, but you should remember, Paul is under inspiration of the Holy Spirit and he isn't writing from an agricultural position, but from a theological position. This is God's logic, not human logic, which makes all the difference!

Romans

11:16-24



SECTION II: PAUL'S ANALOGIES - *"The Major Components of the Olive Tree"* (v. 17)

¹⁷If, however, some of the branches were broken off, you now, being a wild olive [branch], were grafted in among them and a fellow-partaker with the root of the oily sap of the olive tree...,

Before we begin to discuss this very important section of Romans 11, it's important that you understand the examples that St. Paul uses. The following is a chart that will explain the key components that are used:

Analogy	Explanation
<p>Wild Olive Tree (ἄγριέλαιος) – a compound noun: ἄγριος – “wild” “<i>uncultivated</i>” and ελαία – “olive tree.”</p>	<p>Gentiles</p>
<p>Graft (ἐγκεντρίζω) – literally to “<i>in puncture</i>” and this verb is used six times in this section and is used in the passive each time, i.e., God is doing the grafting!</p>	<p>This verb, in the NT, always refers to God combining His two redeemed ethnic groups (OT & NT believers) into One people</p>
<p>Fellow-Partaker (συνκοινωνός) – “<i>A close companion; a joint-sharer; to participate with others.</i>”</p>	<p>This implies that both the “root” and the “branches” benefit from the rich sap of the tree. It also brings out the significance of the concept of <i>Koinonia</i> (Life Together)!</p>
<p>Root (ῥιζης) – this word can have a number of meanings: “<i>progenitors</i>” or “<i>cause, origin, source</i>”</p>	<p>In the context of Rom 11, Paul is referring to the patriarchs (cf. v.28); in the context of the NT Church the root is Jesus Christ!</p>

Analogy	Explanation
Oily sap (πιότης) – richness (oiliness) or fatness.	This word is a derivative of “ <i>to drink.</i> ” Thus, to partake, to drink from the nourishing “ <i>water</i> ” and “ <i>blood</i> ” of the Sacraments (and the preached Word) for the purpose of sanctification. Jesus speaks of this in St. John 6.
Olive Tree (ελαία)	Figuratively, the people of God indwelt by the Holy Spirit (the fulfillment of the πιότης.)
Boast (κατακαυχῶ) – “ <i>boast against,</i> ” “ <i>exult over by use of false superiority.</i> ”	Paul is telling Gentiles that acting as if you are above the fallen Jews is boasting or using false superiority. Remembering the use of the Greek passives, the Gentiles did nothing to become adopted; it was all God’s work! Don’t hold God’s actions over others as if you brought them upon yourself. You are fortunate to be included, and you don’t deserve it. It’s sad that the Jews have fallen away; however, they are to be treated with utmost care for their soul’s salvation.
High minded (φρόνει) – “ <i>think too highly of self;</i> ” “ <i>conceited.</i> ”	This word is quite difficult to translate, since it combines the visceral and cognitive aspects of thinking.
Be afraid (φοβοῦ) – “ <i>fear</i> ” “ <i>dread</i> ” or “ <i>reverence.</i> ”	The proper fear of God means to respect and hold Him in awe, never taking for granted the gifts He bestows upon you. Always approaching Him in deep respect, remembering your unworthiness, and with utmost reverence of His grace, mercy, peace and love.

Romans

11:16-24



SECTION II: PAUL'S ANALOGIES - "The Warning" (v.18)

¹⁸do not boast against the branches. If now you boast against [them], you do not support the root, but the root you.

St. Paul has dealt with this earlier in Romans (cf. 2:17, 23), which uses a cognate to "***boasting***" (as discussed). In chapter 2, it was the Jews who were boasting against Gentiles who were excluded (3:27). Here, Paul equally warns Gentiles against an arrogant attitude toward the Jews. In both cases, such behavior stems from failing to acknowledge one's complete and total dependence upon the LORD who graces us with His saving righteousness -- totally apart from our works. Thus, in a very real sense, this verse prohibits anti-Semitism and vice versa.

Romans

11:16-24



SECTION II: PAUL'S ANALOGIES - "The Warning" (v.18)

¹⁸do not boast against the branches. If now you boast against [them], you do not support the root, but the root you.

The bottom line: Gentiles, all non-Jews, have been incorporated into the Olive Tree and are nourished in and through the blessings promised to Israel's patriarchs. No amount of boasting, in any way, on the part of the branches, which have been grafted in (Gentiles), can reverse their relation to the root.

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SECTION II: PAUL'S ANALOGIES - *"The Reply"* (v. 19)

19 You will then say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in."

This is a rhetorical device that Paul often uses as he presumes and offers a plausible reply. The reality of this verse seems closest to 9:19 both in form and as a representative reply. Note that there is a "*hina*" (ἵνα) "*so that*" clause that in the Greek, once again, this very important for you. It's a statement of assertion of purpose, albeit an egotistical purpose! And, if it is egotistical, it does not represent a true statement of God's purpose. The actual reason in this cause, or purpose clause, that some branches were broken off was not to make room for the Gentile (for you); neither does it reside within the plan, desire, act, or purpose of God!

Romans

11:16-24



SECTION II: PAUL'S ANALOGIES - "The Reply" (v.19)

¹⁹You will then say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in."

The early Church father, Ambrosiaster, gives the true theological explanation:

"But the Jews were not condemned by God in order to let the Gentiles in. They condemned themselves by rejecting God's gift, and by doing that they gave the Gentiles an opportunity to be saved [by God's grace]. Paul wants to stop this boasting, so that we might rejoice in our salvation rather than insult the weak. For the man who insults a sinner is easily deceived."¹

¹Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Paul's Epistles*, (Bray, Romans, ACCS NT 6:284).

*Next
Week!*



*Romans
11:20-24*



*THE ONLY DISTINCTION THAT
MATTERS:
FAITH OR UNBELIEF*

