

Romans 11:19-24

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If we let ourselves become arrogant, if we lord over others, God will discipline us. God is in the business of redeeming. He will bring Israel back to Him; therefore Gentiles should not look down on unbelieving Jews.

Paul tells his audience that they *will say then*, “Branches were broken off, so that I might be grafted in” (v 19). Grafting is an agricultural technique whereby a branch from one tree is placed into a cut on another tree and that branch begins to grow and becomes nurtured by its new host tree. Similarly, Gentiles are now receiving the benefit of all the promises God made to Abraham and Israel. It is pretty natural for anyone to assume they are superior to those who fell before them, but God is adamant that is not true in this case. God loves Gentiles and Jews alike. Paul is warning his Gentile readers (whose faith is spoken of throughout the world, Romans 1:8) not to become haughty in their faith.

Paul says that branches in the natural tree were broken off to make way for the Gentiles’ wild olive branches to be grafted in: *they* (Israel’s branches) *were broken off for their unbelief* (v 20).

Paul is essentially warning the Gentile believers, “Don’t attribute your standing before God to yourself. You didn’t earn being justified before me; you are not better than the fallen Israelites.” They can only *stand by* [their] *faith* (v 20). He is warning his readers: *Do not be conceited, but fear* (v 20).

This applies to Gentile Christians of today. If Gentiles become haughty, conceited, and look down upon Israel, they will suffer consequences (vv 20–21). The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 9:10). To fear the Lord is to be most concerned about what He thinks, to seek to please Him above all opinions of people. This means that we give no value to rejection of people so long as we are following God’s commands. Jesus gave us this example (Hebrews 12:1-2).

It is interesting here that the opposite of being *conceited* is to *fear* the Lord. To be *conceited* is to have a high opinion of ourselves. To *fear* the Lord is to be concerned about what He thinks. Paul exhorts the Roman believers not to begin to congratulate themselves or consider themselves superior.

Sin has consequences for everyone, including believers. This is one of Paul’s most emphasized points in the letter to the Romans. Can we sin and grace will abound? Yes. Nothing can separate believers from the love of God (Romans 8:37–39). If we do sin, are there consequences? Yes. If we go back into the death from which we were delivered, what are we going to get? Negative consequences (Romans 6:15-16).

The result of sin is separation from things that are good for us; this separation is what the Bible calls “death.” If we go back into the slavery from which we were delivered, what are we going to get? We’re going to get slavery and addiction. We will go through the sequence of increasing

self-destruction that sin brings about as Paul outlined in Chapter 1 (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). This destruction of sin ends in loss of mental health (Romans 1:28).

The Jews were *broken off for their unbelief*. They lost the benefit of their inheritance due to not believing God and following His way. This has been the pattern of Israel from the beginning. The first generation out of Egypt failed to receive the inheritance they had been granted because they did not believe God, and would not cross over and possess the land. New Testament believers are warned not to make this same mistake and lose the opportunity to possess and benefit from experiencing the reward of their inheritance (Hebrews 3:15). We are exhorted to be diligent to walk in faith and possess the reward of our inheritance (Hebrews 4:11).

Through our faith we receive God's kindness; through our conceit we experience God's severity. Paul warns: *Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either* (vv 20–21). What does that mean? Elsewhere in the Bible, there is a "sin unto death" (1 John 5:16, Acts 5). We believers are going to heaven, nothing can separate us from the power of Christ's resurrection, but we can separate ourselves from the blessing of God, by being haughty and following our own way.

When we fail to walk in faith we lose the reward of our inheritance (Colossians 3:23). If we fail to walk in faithfulness, when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ we will see our deeds burned up and will not receive a reward (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

But that does not affect whether we are in God's family—that is a gift that is given unconditionally. All it takes to be born again and become a child in God's family is to have enough faith to look upon Jesus on the cross, hoping God will fulfill His promise to deliver us from the deadly venom of sin (John 3:14-15). Israel will never lose being God's people, and no child of God will ever lose being in God's family (Romans 11:29, 8:38-39). But disobedience has consequences, and Israel was *broken off for their unbelief*. This is similar to Israel being exiled for disobeying God in the Old Testament (1 Chronicles 9:1). This was a consequence for disobedience, but God remained faithful to Israel (Romans 11:29).

Paul notes the *severity of God* toward Israel *who fell* in disobedience, as contrasted with *God's kindness* to the Gentiles:

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 (v 22).

However, Paul notes that God is consistent. If the Gentiles follow in the same pattern of disobedience and "I know better than God what is best for me" (pride) then they will also be *cut off* from the blessings that attend walking in fellowship with God and following His ways.

In Acts 7:53, the deacon Stephen makes it clear that Israel's rejection is a pattern. God's people were exiled for disobedience and not listening to the prophets. Believers who do not listen to Jesus are following in that same example. But in both cases God does not reject His people from being His. He did not reject Israel, they just experienced the negative consequences of their choices, and if we choose to be slaves to sin, the wages of sin is death—separation from the benefits of walking in God's ways. The fundamental problem in each case is pride.

For the Jews, *if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again* (v 23).

The Jews *will be grafted* back into their own olive tree, the true spiritual nation of Israel. The Gentiles *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 [Jews] be grafted into their own olive tree* of Israel (v 24)?

Paul argues that if great blessings can come to Gentiles through a walk of faith, how much more will great blessings be given to God's own people if they begin to walk in faith.

The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable (Romans 11:29). Rebellious Christians are invited to turn back to walking in the Spirit. Righteous Christians can always stumble and fall away from walking in faith. There's no retirement from sanctification/discipleship. So, believers should not be conceited; we should instead be grateful for the kindness of God and fear the severity of God. We will reap what we sow, and if we sow to the flesh we reap destruction (Galatians 6:8).

As we saw in Romans 1, if we desire the things of the world and the flesh, God will let us have our desires if we insist, along with the negative consequences of those sins (Romans 1:24, 26, 28).

Some things are unconditional. The gifts and calling of God are unconditional (Romans 11:29). God birthed Israel as a gift and will never reject Israel (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). Our birth as believers is unconditional. God gives it to us, and we just receive it (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The gifts God gives us, He gives without condition. Being an heir of God, having God as our inheritance is unconditional (Romans 8:17a). But there are a lot of things that are conditional. It's conditional whether we actually have the benefits of the resurrected life—that depends on whether we walk by faith (Galatians 6:8).

It's conditional whether we receive the reward of being joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17b; Revelation 3:21). If we want to be joint heirs with Christ and share His reward of reigning, then we have to suffer the sufferings of Christ. And if we want the blessings and benefits of our faith, then we have to walk in belief.

The theme verse of Romans is found in 1:17, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'" God clearly commands us to live by faith; this is the way He designed us to live, trusting totally in Him. This is how we gain the greatest fulfillment in life.

If we become haughty and lord our position over people who have fallen away, God will deal with us as he dealt with them. As Jesus says in explaining the primary point of the Lord's prayer,

"For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matthew 6:14-15).

This is a sort of heavenly application of the golden rule, that God will treat us like we treat others. Therefore it behooves us to always remain humble (see reality as it is) and recognize that God's grace (favor) pours out on the humble but does not reward those who are proud (1 Peter 5:5).

Biblical Text

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?