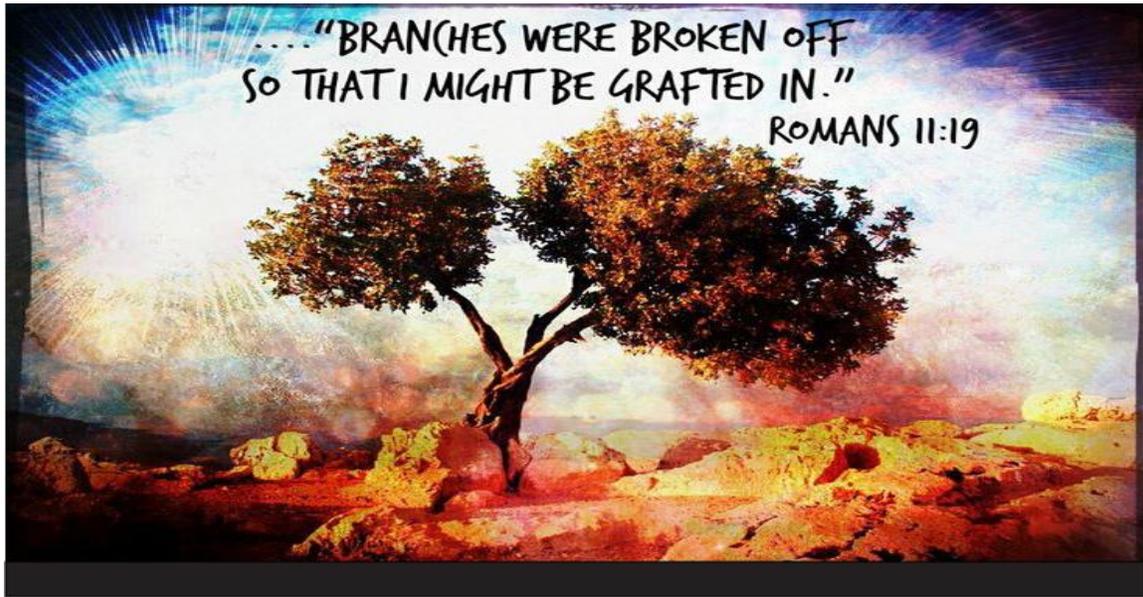


# Ministry of Grace Church

## Romans 11:11-24 – God Gives Grace to the Humble

### Sermon Notes



### Introduction

The most valuable and amazing gift that any one of us could ever receive is the salvation that God has freely given to us through faith in Jesus Christ. Throughout this letter, Paul has been explaining why this salvation is all God's doing and none of ours. Therefore, this salvation, and the righteousness that comes with it, should not cause us to be proud. It should cause us to be filled with reverential fear and humility. Because of this salvation, we are in a most favored position with God, and He has adopted us as His children. As we are about to learn, the Jews lost their "most favored" position with God so that we could receive it. And, like the Jews were, we are now set-apart by God for His use. Being chosen by God to serve Him is a great privilege and an honor, which should humble us both now and forever. And we should not boast about our position in Christ, because it is God who is responsible for who and what we are. As a result, we should be sharing the Gospel message so that we don't lose our honored position like the Jews did.

Keep in mind that the biggest hindrance to a rewarding and satisfying relationship with God is pride. Our relationship with Almighty God should not produce pride. It should produce profound humility. The Jews believed that their righteousness and their "most-favored" position with God was earned by obeying the Law. But because of that they became proud, which caused them to stumble. In fact, they were so proud of their position with God that they completely missed it when their long-awaited Messiah came. Instead of welcoming Him with praise and honor, they crucified Him.

## **Romans 11:11-12**

**I say then, did they stumble so as to fall? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fullness be!**

Once again, Paul uses a rhetorical question to make his point. This time it is to introduce the notion that even though the Jews have stumbled on the rock (Jesus Christ), it is not a permanent condition for all Jews. A remnant of the Jews will be restored at some time in the future. And - one of God's purposes in having given salvation to the Gentiles was to provoke the Jews to jealousy. That which they had exclusive access to, a relationship with the Almighty God, is now being enjoyed by the Gentiles, while the Jews have lost their "most-favored" position.

This is also depicted in [Matthew 22:1-10](#) where Jesus told the parable of the wedding feast. Those who were invited by the king did not want to come, so he sent his army to destroy them and invited the strangers from all around to come to the wedding. That is precisely what happened to the Jews. They refused to come to the Messiah, so God invited the Gentiles to partake of the riches of His grace.

But - so that we don't also get proud of the relationship we have with God, Paul turns this around. He says that if the stumbling and loss of the Jews resulted in blessing to the Gentiles, how much more so will the fullness of the Jews be. In other words, Paul is projecting to a future time when the remnant of Israel will believe. With the zeal and ardor that the Jews possess, as well as their mastery of the Old Testament and their knowledge of God, imagine how they will spread the message!

## **Romans 11:13-15**

**But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?**

Having focused on the Jews and their lost blessing, Paul now shifts his focus to us Gentiles. He is doing this for a couple of reasons. The first is to provoke his fellow Jews to jealousy. The other is to warn the Gentiles (Christians) not to be too complacent and proud, because our salvation is a gift just as the salvation of the Jews was a gift

Now, what does Paul mean by, "I magnify my ministry"? This is a very misunderstood statement. Paul is not bragging about his ministry. He is saying that he considers his calling as the Apostle of the Gentiles to be both a great honor and a great responsibility. He believes that the calling which he has received is one of great importance and as such he will not rest until he has completely fulfilled it.

The next thing that Paul says sounds awkward in English so it is difficult to understand exactly what he is saying. In order to understand this better we can take out the parenthetical expression from the previous verse and then put these two verses together and paraphrase the first part of the current verse. Then we have,

**But I am speaking to you because it may be a way that I might provoke my fellow countrymen to jealousy and save some of them.**

Since Paul considers his calling as the Apostle to the Gentiles an honor and a great responsibility, he is determined to carry it out to the fullest because it might also provoke some of his fellow Jews to jealousy and they might, through such jealousy, seek the truth of Christ and become saved themselves. Remember, because of their lack of faith, God decided to cast the Jews aside. But, as always, He had a purpose in

casting them aside. His plan in turning from the faithless Jews was to have His message delivered to the Gentiles.

### **Romans 11:16-18**

**And if the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became a partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast against them, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you.**

The Greek word translated “first piece” is a reference to the Hebrew word for “firstfruit.” In the Old Testament, the “firstfruit” offering was the part of the crop that ripened first and was to be sacrificed to God before partaking of the remainder of the crop. It was a way for the Jews to signify that the entire crop came from God. Even though man planted it, God alone caused the seed to germinate, God alone provided the rain and caused the plant to grow, and God alone caused the fruit to form and ripen.

I believe that Paul’s reference here is to the fact that it was a few Jews who were the first to believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah. And it was first to these Jews that the glorious message of His resurrection was announced. They were the first Christians. These Jewish believers were holy. That is, they were “set-apart,” set-apart *from* the world of unbelievers and set-apart *to* God for His use and for His glorification.

If these first few Jews were set-apart by God, so also will the remainder of the church be set-apart. Likewise, Paul equates this to the root of an olive tree as being holy which causes the remainder of the tree, the branches, to be holy (set-apart).

The illustration here is of a cultivated olive tree into which branches from a wild olive tree were grafted and thus the engrafted branches produced fruit from the nurturing of the roots. In reality, however, a husbandman would not do this. Instead, he would take branches from a fruitful, cultivated olive tree and graft them into a wild, unfruitful tree stock to produce fruit. You see, a wild olive tree produces very little fruit and what it does produce is small and bitter. But a cultivated tree produces a greater quantity and better quality fruit. In nature it is only when the good branches are grafted into the fruitless rootstock that good fruit is produced. But, as Paul will tell us in verse twenty-four, God’s engrafting is “contrary to nature.” That’s the way God does things.

So why does Paul talk about an olive tree in which the fruitfulness comes from the root and not the branches? It is to show the supernatural quality of holiness. It is not produced in the branches; it is produced in the root, God Himself. Paul says that some of the branches of the holy tree were broken off.

This refers to the Jews who rejected the Messiah when He first came. Paul then says that “you,” referring to individual Gentiles, who were from a fruitless, wild olive tree, were grafted in among the remaining branches (the few believing Jews, among whom were the apostles). He points out that the result of the grafting is that the branches, both the natural and the engrafted ones, now share in the blessings and holiness of the root.

Paul is emphasizing two things here. The first is that the Gentiles did not attain holiness (fruitfulness) apart from the holy root. And the second thing is that the Gentiles were included in the church only because, and after, the Jews rejected God’s offer. And he will declare in verse twenty that the reason that the branches were broken off is because they did not believe the Messiah when He came. And because of their unbelief, the gospel was subsequently proclaimed to the Gentiles (by the Apostles, who were Jews).

Paul now warns us Gentile believers not to boast against the Jews. In other words, “Don’t consider yourselves more worthy than the Jews, who were rejected.” The reason he tells us not to boast is because we are not the ones who sustain the root (God), but it is the root that sustains and supports us. You see, we didn’t graft ourselves into the tree, God engrafted us. We were not of the original family of blessing (the Jews), and we have done nothing to make ourselves worthy of being included in their blessings.

Remember that it is God who is the author and finisher of our faith. He chose us, we did not choose Him. He is the one who declared us righteous; we did not earn our righteousness. Without God’s action we are nothing and we are destined for Hell because of our lack of righteousness. We have absolutely nothing to boast about.

### **Romans 11:19-22**

**You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” Quite right! They were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be haughty, but fear, for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. 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.**

Paul is stating what he expects will be the response from proud Gentiles, so that he can counter it. He knows the heart of sinful man and is certain how his readers and hearers will react to what he is saying. He knows they will say, “But the other branches were broken off just so we could be grafted in. It appears that it was God’s purpose to reject those unbelieving Jews so that He could save us Gentiles. Therefore, we must be more important than the Jews; they were taken out of their place, and we have been put in.”

This sort of reasoning, however, assumes that God now considers the Gentiles more important than the Jews; otherwise, He wouldn’t have rejected the Jews, would He? But, this type of reasoning is not just selfish, it is sinful as well. It is, in fact, the very same attitude that the Jews had before they were rejected. They believed that they were better than the Gentiles because they were God’s chosen people. Paul is about to give a stern warning about such thinking.

Paul agrees that the Jews were rejected for not believing and that we stand because we believe. That’s why he gives this warning, “**Do not be haughty, but fear.**” We should not become proud or arrogant, thinking that we are something special because God chose to graft us into the olive tree; instead, we should be filled with reverential fear.

Because we believe that we are sinners and that Jesus Christ gave his perfect, sinless life on our behalf, God has declared us to be as righteous as Christ. Through this righteousness we are seen by God as sinless, He has adopted us as His sons, and we are guaranteed eternal life instead of the eternal damnation that we truly deserve.

The point that Paul is making is that if God did not spare the natural branches, the Jews, but rejected them as a people, thus turning to the Gentiles and grafting us in, then we must not be arrogant about this. Instead, we should consider our position as God’s chosen ones with reverential fear knowing that God is just as able to reject the Gentiles and turn back to the Jews.

In fact, I believe that this is exactly what God is going to do. If you study **Daniel 9:23-27** you will learn about the 70 weeks of years that God has decreed for the Jews. The first 69 weeks cover the time from the decree to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem up to the rejection of the Messiah by the Jews and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. Between the 69<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> weeks, however, there is a pause, which is where God turns to the Gentiles. This is the church age in which we are living right now. Just before the

70<sup>th</sup> week begins, God will rapture the church, removing us from the earth, and will once again deal with the Jews. This ushers in Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week, the seven-year period called The Tribulation.

During this seven-year period, God's focus will be on the Jews, not the Gentiles. In other words, during the tribulation God will reject the Gentile world. That is, He will break them off as branches. At the same time, he will deal directly with the Jewish nation once more, a remnant of them will believe, and He will graft them back into the holy root stock.

Paul is now showing two of the characteristics of God; on the one hand, goodness, and on the other hand, severity. We all like to think of God's goodness and the fact that "God is love," but we tend to overlook His severity and the fact that He is also holy (perfectly righteous and without sin). His holiness also means that He must judge sin and separate the sinner from Himself. That's very severe!

Keep in mind that Paul is portraying God as the holy gardener. A good gardener knows that useless and dying branches must be cut off and other branches ingrafted if the tree is going to continue to flourish. In a typical olive grove, trees are often hundreds of years old due to proper cutting (severity) and careful ingrafting (goodness).

Let me pause to clarify who Paul is talking to in these verses. Beginning back in verse seventeen, the use of the second person personal pronoun "you" is "you singular," not "you plural." In the King James Version, you will notice the use of "thee" or "thou," not "you." Therefore, some might misinterpret this part of Romans eleven as a warning that a person can lose his or her salvation if he or she stops believing. However, notice that throughout this passage Paul is contrasting Jews and Gentiles, not believers and unbelievers. In the Bible, individual nations are often referred to in the second person singular. Therefore, these warnings are to individual Gentiles or individual Gentile nations, not individual believers. Also notice that he is not accusing the Jews of believing and then no longer believing. These Jews never believed in the first place.

The Greek word translated "severity," literally means "cut-offness." In other words, God has shown severity (cut-off-ness) to those who have fallen (Jews, plural, who refused to believe), but He has shown kindness (or goodness) to individual Gentiles or Gentile nations. This goodness is in the form of "the fatness of the root" as he told us in verse seventeen.

Paul now restates a key point that we need to pay attention to. It is his warning to the Gentile nations that if we don't continue in His goodness, we as a people or a nation, will also be cut off.

### **Romans 11:23-24**

**And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 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?**

Let me say once again that Paul's metaphor of the branches and the olive tree is referring to Jews as individuals and Gentiles as individuals or individual nations. If the metaphorical reference to the pruned branches referred to the Jewish nation as a whole, then he would be saying that God has rejected all Jews and none of them could be saved today. Also remember that the metaphorical comparison is between Jews and Gentiles, not Jews and Christians. Therefore, do not try to read into this that Paul is warning that we can lose our salvation if we don't continue in God's goodness.

Paul has warned us Gentiles that as a people we need to remain in a condition of belief, or we as a people will be cut off. Incidentally, this is a threat which, based on current national and world conditions (not remaining in a state of belief as a people), could become a reality any day now.

Now we're told that if the Jews do not remain in a state of unbelief, that is, if Jewish people finally recognize their Messiah, they will be grafted back into a condition of experiencing God's goodness instead of His severity. But not all of the Jewish people will be grafted in, only a small group. This group of Jews is referred to by Isaiah as the "remnant." (see [Isaiah 10:21-22](#))

### **So What?**

We need to guard this precious faith and the message of salvation through the shed blood of Jesus Christ as a treasure from God. But we need to openly share this treasure with those around us. It is not something to be hoarded; rather, it is something to be given away! Have you shared this treasure with anyone lately?

We Christians tend to take our salvation too lightly. We forget that the combined riches of the whole world cannot even come close to the price of eternal blessing in the presence of Almighty God. It is a priceless treasure that has been freely given to us, not because we deserve it in any way, but because God chose to give it to us. But the church today is more and more resembling the Jews of Jesus' time. We have become complacent and have placed greater value in following the rules and traditions of our denominations than in following and being obedient to Christ. Or, we have placed more value in the sign gifts than the service gifts. Or, we come to church for the entertainment value because it makes us feel good. That is selfishness.

You may not have the spiritual gift of evangelism, but that doesn't release you from the responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel message. Oh, that we all cared as much as Paul about proclaiming the message of salvation to the unsaved!

Remember what Paul has been teaching us, that we are not the ones responsible for our salvation and the blessings that come from it. God, as we are told in [Hebrews 12:2](#), "is the author and perfecter of our faith." He is the one who caused us to believe; therefore, we are not the authors of our faith, He is. We do not cause the plants to grow and produce seed, God does. We are totally dependent on God for all of life and especially for spiritual (eternal) life. This should not make us proud; instead, it should humble us in the presence of Almighty God who chose us.

Let us once again take stock of our own unworthiness and the blessing of God's grace. Let our gratefulness be shown in giving all we have to and for Him. Let us humble ourselves before our Lord and Master, for He is worthy!

We need to stop being like the Jews of Jesus's day. We need to recognize once again how precious this faith is and what amazing promises we have for eternity. We have to stop being like the Pharisees! We need to discern the signs of the times! There are many indications that the return of Christ is very near. In light of this knowledge, we should be diligent in faithful service to God. We should be proclaiming the gospel message to everyone around us. We need to focus on God and the mission He has given us. Is that how you're living your life right now? Is your life focus on God, or on yourself?

Remember, one of the products of a close walk with Almighty God is not pride, but humility. Both James and Peter tell us,

**"God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." ([James 4:6](#), & [1 Peter 5:5](#))**

Let's pray