

God Prunes and Grafts

Lesson 12 – August 23, 2026

Bible Basis: Belief in Jesus Christ is the core belief that Jews and Gentiles can be united.

Memory Verse: “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity: but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off” (Romans 11:22)

Lesson Aim

To help learners understand how God’s covenant faithfulness extends to both Israel and the Gentiles, calling all believers to walk in humility, gratitude, and steadfast faith as they participate in His redemptive plan.

Background context:

Written around AD 57 from Corinth, Romans addressed believers in the capital—house churches made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Emperor Claudius had expelled Jews from Rome in AD 49 ([Acts 18:2](#)). By the time of Nero, many had returned. This back-and-forth shaped the tension Paul tackles in chapters 9–11.

Background Scriptures: John 15:1-8 correlation with Romans 9

John 15 explains the believer's need to remain in Christ, while Romans 11 shows how God incorporates believers into His covenant people by faith. Both use the image of branches drawing life from a divine source and warn against the danger of separation through unbelief.

The Lesson:

Filling in the missing pieces:

Verses 1–6 – God Has Not Rejected Israel

Paul, speaking as an Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin, insists that God has not pushed Israel aside. A remnant chosen “by grace” survives, just as in Elijah’s day when 7,000 faithful were hidden. Works never secured the remnant; grace alone did.

Verses 7–10 – A Stumbling, Not a Final Fall

The majority of Israel sought righteousness but missed it, while the elect obtained it. God

allowed spiritual dullness—“eyes that could not see and ears that could not hear”—so that the nation would stumble, fulfilling Psalm 69:22–23.

I The Fall Resulted In Fortune

11I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation *has come* to the Gentiles. **12**Now if their fall *is* riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!

What's Happening Here? (Romans 11:11–12)

Romans 11:11 — “Have they stumbled that they should fall?”

Paul asks whether Israel’s stumbling means that God has **permanently rejected Israel**.

His answer is emphatic:

“Certainly not!”

The word “stumbled” suggests a **temporary setback**, not necessarily a final destination. Paul is making a distinction between **stumbling** and **falling beyond recovery**.

Israel’s rejection of Christ resulted in the gospel going out more broadly to the Gentiles. But God did not abandon His purposes for Israel.

“Through their fall... salvation has come to the Gentiles”

This is an amazing part of God's plan.

Because many Israelites rejected the Messiah, the gospel was proclaimed extensively among the Gentiles.

Paul says this was:

“to provoke them to jealousy”

This doesn't mean God wanted Israel to be bitter or envious.

Rather, Paul is describing how seeing Gentiles receive God's salvation and blessings could **awaken Israel to what they were missing** and ultimately move them toward faith in Christ.

Think of the progression:

Israel's stumbling → Gospel reaches Gentiles → Gentiles receive salvation → Israel is stirred → Israel can turn back to Christ

Romans 11:12 — “If their fall is riches for the world...”

Now Paul makes an “if...how much more” argument.

If something good has come from Israel's present rejection—namely, “**riches for the world**” and “**riches for the Gentiles**”—then imagine what God can accomplish when Israel experiences its **fullness**.

What does “fullness” mean?

The Greek word is **πλήρωμα** (*plērōma*), meaning **fullness, completion, or the full measure**.

In this context, “their fullness” points to Israel reaching the **fullness of what God intends for them**, in contrast with their present condition of unbelief.

Paul's point is essentially:

“If Israel's stumbling has resulted in such blessing for the Gentiles, how much greater will God's purposes be when Israel comes into its fullness?”

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- Their failure resulted in blessings reaching the Gentiles.
 - The Gentiles receiving salvation should lead to humility, not pride.
 - Israel's “fullness” points toward an even greater expression of God's redemptive purposes.
 - And ultimately, Romans 11 points us toward God's extraordinary mercy to **both Jews and Gentiles**.

“For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.”
— Romans 11:32

II The Dead Brought Back to Life (vv. 13-15)

13For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, **14**if by any means I may provoke to jealousy *those who are* my flesh and save some of them. **15**For if their being cast away *is* the reconciling of the world, what *will* their acceptance *be* but life from the dead?

What's Happening Here? (Romans 11:13–15)

Romans 11:13 — “I speak to you Gentiles”

Paul now directly addresses the **Gentile believers**.

He says:

“I am an apostle to the Gentiles.”

Paul had a special calling to proclaim the gospel to Gentiles. He says he “**magnifies**” his **ministry**—not because he is boasting about himself, but because he recognizes the enormous significance of the assignment God gave him.

In other words:

“God has entrusted me with an important ministry to you Gentiles, and I take that calling seriously.”

Romans 11:14 — “If by any means I may provoke to jealousy...”

Here Paul reveals something fascinating about his ministry.

He wants the Gentiles to receive God's blessings in such a way that **Israel sees what God is doing among the Gentiles and is stirred toward faith in Christ**.

This is the second time Paul has mentioned this idea.

Compare:

- **Verse 11:** salvation came to Gentiles “to provoke them to jealousy.”
- **Verse 14:** Paul hopes his ministry among Gentiles will “provoke to jealousy” his fellow Israelites.

Paul isn't trying to make Israel jealous in a petty or competitive way.

The idea is more like:

“I want my fellow Jews to see the salvation and relationship with God that Gentiles are experiencing through Christ, and I want that to awaken them to faith in their Messiah.”

And notice Paul's heart:

“and save some of them.”

Paul isn't trying to win an argument with Israel.

He wants people to be saved.

Romans 11:15 — “Their being cast away...”

This phrase can sound severe, so we need to read it in the context of the entire chapter.

“Cast away” refers to Israel's present **rejection/unbelief concerning Christ**, not to God permanently abandoning every Jewish person.

Paul has already said:

“God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew.” — Romans 11:2

So Paul is describing a **present condition**, not God's final rejection of Israel.

“If their being cast away is the reconciling of the world...”

Here's Paul's remarkable argument:

Because many Israelites rejected Christ, the gospel went out to the Gentile world.

And through the gospel, Gentiles could be **reconciled to God**.

So:

Israel's rejection → Gospel reaches Gentiles → Gentiles reconciled to God

But then Paul asks:

“What will their acceptance be but life from the dead?”

This is the powerful phrase.

“Their acceptance” stands in contrast to their present rejection.

Paul is looking forward to a future work of God involving Israel that will be extraordinarily significant.

And he describes its effect as:

“life from the dead.”

There are a couple of ways this phrase has been understood:

1. **A picture of tremendous spiritual renewal**—Israel turning toward Christ and experiencing spiritual life.

2. **A reference to the resurrection**—the ultimate resurrection and completion of God's redemptive purposes.

Paul doesn't explain the phrase completely here, so we shouldn't force it to mean only one thing.

But the main point is clear:

If Israel's present rejection has resulted in such blessing for the Gentile world, Paul's expectation is that Israel's future acceptance will bring something even greater.

Notice Paul's “How Much More” pattern

Paul is building an argument throughout these verses:

Romans 11:12

Israel's **fall** → riches for the world

Israel's **failure** → riches for Gentiles

How much more their fullness!

Romans 11:15

Israel's **casting away** → reconciliation of the world

How much more their acceptance!

Paul keeps saying:

“If God can bring this much blessing out of Israel's present stumbling, imagine what God will do when His purposes for Israel reach their fullness.”

III- The Cultivated and the Wild Olive Tree (vv.16-17)

16For if the firstfruit *is* holy, the lump *is* also *holy*; and if the root *is* holy, so *are* the branches. **17**And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree,

What's Happening Here? (Romans 11:16–17)

Paul now uses a **powerful agricultural metaphor** — the **olive tree** — to explain how Israel and the Gentiles fit into God's redemptive plan.

This section has four major movements.

1. The Root Is Holy — So the Branches Are Holy (v. 16)

Romans 11:16

Paul is continuing his discussion of **Israel, the Gentiles, and God's covenant purposes**.

1. “If the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy”

Paul is using an illustration from the Old Testament practice of offering the **first portion of a harvest to God**.

The basic principle is:

The first portion represents the whole.

If the first portion is set apart to God, the rest of the harvest is viewed in relation to that consecrated portion.

Paul appears to be pointing back to the **Jewish patriarchs and the covenant beginnings**— particularly the people through whom God's promises came. **Abraham, Isaac, Jacob**

So Paul is saying, in effect:

“The beginning of God's covenant relationship with Israel was holy/set apart to God, and God's purposes concerning the people that came from that beginning have not simply disappeared.”

“Holy” here means **set apart for God**, rather than meaning that every individual Israelite is personally sinless.

2. “If the root is holy, so are the branches”

Now Paul switches to the **olive tree** illustration that he develops in verses 17–24.

Think of it like this:

ROOT → BRANCHES

The root represents the **holy, covenantal foundation of God's promises**.

The branches represent the people connected to that covenantal root.

This is important because Paul is establishing the foundation for what he is about to tell the Gentiles:

You didn't create the tree.

The Gentiles are going to be described as branches **grafted into** the tree.

Therefore, they have no reason to boast against the natural branches.

What does “holy” mean here?

This is especially important.

Paul is **not** saying:

“Every individual Israelite is automatically spiritually holy and saved.”

Romans 9–11 clearly deals with the reality of **faith and unbelief**.

Instead, “holy” is being **set apart in relation to God's covenant purposes**.

So we can distinguish:

Personal salvation → comes through faith in Christ.

Covenantal/historical holiness → refers to being set apart in connection with God's promises and purposes.

That's why Paul can talk about some branches being **broken off** and others being **grafted in** in the following verses.

Teaching Point: God's grace should produce humility, not pride.

2. Some Natural Branches Were Broken Off (v. 17)

Paul describes:

- **The olive tree** → representing God's covenantal/rooted people and God's promises.
- **Natural branches** → Jewish people connected to that covenantal heritage.
- **Wild olive branches** → Gentiles who believe in Christ.
- **Grafting in** → Gentile believers being brought into participation in the spiritual blessings that come through God's covenant promises.

Paul says the wild olive branch was “**grafted in among them**” and became a **partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree**.

What does this mean spiritually?

To be **grafted in** means that Gentile believers are **brought into participation in God's saving blessings through faith in Christ**.

IV- The Proudful and The Humble (vv. 18-24)

18do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, *remember that* you do not support the root, but the root *supports* you. **19**You will say then, “Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.” **20**Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. **21**For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. **22**Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in *His* goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. **23**And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. **24**For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who *are* natural *branches*, be grafted into their own olive tree?

What's Happening Here? (vv.18-24)

Romans 11:18 — “Boast not against the branches”

Wild Branches (Gentiles) Were Grafted In (vv. 17–18)

But notice Paul's warning in verse 18:

“Boast not against the branches.”

Paul is saying, essentially:

“Don't become proud. You didn't create the root. The root is supporting you.”

The Gentile believer doesn't replace God or become superior to Jewish people. Instead, the Gentile believer is **graciously included** in what God has been doing.

The picture is powerful

Gentiles must never look down on Israel. Their place in the tree is **by grace**, not superiority.

Teaching Point: You are supported by the root; the root does not depend on you.

Spiritually, this means we should never look down on others because of the grace we have received.

Romans 11:19 — “The branches were broken off...”

Someone might argue:

“The Jewish branches were removed so that I could be grafted in.”

Paul is addressing the possibility of Gentile arrogance.

Yes, some branches were broken off because of **unbelief**, but that does not make the grafted-in branches superior.

Romans 11:20 — “Because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith”

Paul gives two contrasting words:

Unbelief → branches broken off

Faith → branches standing

The Gentile Believer has no reason to boast because their position comes through faith, not personal merit.

Then Paul says:

“Be not highminded, but fear.”

Teaching Point: Don't become spiritually proud. Remain humble before God.

Romans 11:21 — “If God spared not the natural branches...”

Paul gives a serious warning.

If God did not simply overlook unbelief among the natural branches (Israel), Gentile believers should not assume that God approves of pride and unbelief in them either.

This isn't teaching that God is looking for reasons to reject faithful believers. Rather, Paul is warning against **presumption**—the attitude that says, *“I can reject God and still have nothing to worry about.”*

Romans 11:22 — “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God”

This is a powerful statement.

Paul tells us to recognize both:

God's goodness

→ He has shown mercy and kindness by bringing Gentiles into His saving purposes.

God's severity

→ God takes unbelief and rejection seriously.

Then Paul says:

“On them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness.”

Teaching Point: God's grace should produce continued faith and humility, not arrogance.

Romans 11:23 — “If they abide not still in unbelief...”

Now Paul turns back to Israel.

This is where the passage becomes especially encouraging.

If the Jewish people do not continue in unbelief, God is able to graft them in again.

Notice the phrase:

“God is able.”

Their being broken off is not necessarily the end of the story.

God is able to restore.

That is consistent with Paul's larger argument in Romans 11 concerning Israel's eventual restoration.

Romans 11:24 — The “wild olive tree” and “good olive tree”

Paul says that Gentiles were grafted into the olive tree even though they were naturally from a **wild olive tree**.

If God was able to take something that was naturally wild and graft it into the cultivated olive tree, how much more can He restore the natural branches to their own olive tree?

Paul is emphasizing God's power to restore Israel.

The big picture of Romans 11:18–24

Paul's message can be summarized like this:

Don't boast.

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You stand by faith.

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Remember God's goodness.

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Take unbelief seriously.

↓

Remain humble.

↓

Remember that God can restore those who have been broken off.

One of the greatest lessons

Grace should never make us arrogant; grace should make us grateful.

The Gentile believer doesn't get to say, “I replaced Israel.”

Instead, Paul says, in effect:

“You were graciously grafted in. Therefore, don't boast against the branches.”

And verse 23 gives tremendous hope:

God is able to graft them in again.

That makes Romans 11 not merely a lesson about an olive tree—it is a lesson about God's **mercy, human faith, humility, and God's ability to restore.**

Application:

1. Trust that God's covenant faithfulness does not change, even when people do.
 2. Examine your heart regularly; unbelief is more dangerous than hardship.
 3. Walk in humility — salvation is a gift, not a trophy.
 4. Celebrate God's mercy without comparing yourself to others.
 5. Strengthen your faith through obedience, worship, and dependence on God.
 6. Live in reverent gratitude, honoring both His kindness and His holiness.
 7. Pray for spiritual renewal — in Israel, in the church, and in your own life.
 8. Believe God can revive anyone — no heart is too hard for His grace.
 9. Embrace unity in Christ — avoid divisions that God Himself has healed.
 10. Serve God with a posture of worship, not entitlement.
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Teaching Points:

1. The Root Determines the Life of the Tree

Teaching Point: Because the root is holy, the entire tree is set apart — God's promises to Israel still stand.

2. Unbelief Breaks Branches, Not God's Plan

Teaching Point: Spiritual privilege does not guarantee spiritual standing — faith does.

3. Gentiles Are Grafted In by Grace, Not Merit

Teaching Point: Our inclusion in God's family is entirely by mercy, not superiority.

4. Pride Is the Enemy of Faith

Teaching Point: Spiritual arrogance blinds us to grace and dishonors God's plan.

5. Faith Keeps You Standing

Teaching Point: Faith is the only foundation that keeps us connected to God's blessings.

6. God's Goodness and Severity Work Together

Teaching Point: God's character is perfectly balanced — His mercy is real, and His holiness is real.

7. Israel's Restoration Is Possible and Promised

Teaching Point: God's heart is always toward restoration, not rejection.

8. God's Power Makes Restoration Beautiful

Teaching Point: God specializes in restoring what seems broken or impossible.

9. The Olive Tree Shows God's Unified People

Teaching Point: God's plan has always been one redeemed people, rooted in His promise.

10. God's Sovereignty Calls Us to Humble Participation

Teaching Point: We are invited to participate in His plan with humility, gratitude, and faith.

Closing Prayer

Father, we thank You for the richness of Your Word and for the mercy that has grafted us into Your family. Today we stand in awe of Your faithfulness — the holy root that has carried Your promises from generation to generation. Keep our hearts humble, grateful, and steadfast in faith. Guard us from pride, and teach us to walk in Your goodness with reverence and joy. Restore those who have turned away, revive Your people, and let Your life flow through every branch of Your kingdom. Strengthen us to reflect Your mercy and to honor Your sovereignty in all we do. In Jesus' name, Amen.

10 Discussion Questions — Romans 11:16–24

1. What does Paul mean when he says the “root is holy,” and how does that shape our understanding of God’s covenant with Israel?
2. Why were some of the natural branches (Israel) “broken off,” and what does this teach us about the consequences of unbelief?
3. How does the grafting in of Gentiles demonstrate God’s mercy and inclusiveness in His redemptive plan?
4. Paul warns Gentile believers not to boast. What forms can spiritual pride take in the church today?
5. What does it mean to “stand by faith,” and how does this posture protect us from arrogance or complacency?
6. How do the “goodness and severity of God” work together to reveal His character?
7. Paul says Israel can be grafted in again if they do not persist in unbelief. What does this reveal about God’s heart toward His people?
8. Why is it significant that God can “graft in again” the natural branches more easily than the wild ones? What does this say about restoration?
9. How does the olive tree metaphor help us understand the unity of God’s people across history — Jews and Gentiles together?
10. In what ways should Gentile believers today demonstrate humility, gratitude, and reverence in light of being grafted into God’s covenant blessings?