**Lesson 30: The Family Tree of Those Saved By Grace**

Text: Romans 11:16-24

**Introduction**

Have you ever conducted research on your family tree? This can prove to be a fascinating and surprising experience! This was certainly the case with the Jewish and Gentile believers of the first century. These two broad ethnic groups have a long history of being at odds. It was difficult for both groups to accept that they shared the same family tree upon placing their faith in Jesus Christ.

In this section of Romans 11, Paul uses a metaphor of an olive tree to teach that all believers share the same family tree! This did not set well with the Jewish believers. There were also problems related to the Gentile believers. Paul wrote this section to deal with the pride that crept into the hearts of the Gentile believers. The rejection by the Jews led to the presentation of the gospel to the Gentiles. The majority of people saved in their time were Gentiles. It was natural for the Gentiles to assume that God had abandoned Israel and that they had replaced Israel as the people of God. This was certainly not the case! In this lesson, we will consider the unity of the people of God and take heed to Paul’s caution against pride.

1. **Paul used a metaphor of an olive tree to teach the unity of the people of God.** 
   1. God has communicated many of the great truths of the Bible in pictures. Paul utilized the power of a metaphor to teach that Jews and Gentiles are the people of God. There are not two trees. There is one!
   2. The olive tree is a symbol of Israel (Jeremiah 11:16; Hosea 14:5-6). It was the most widely cultivated tree in the Mediterranean area (James Dunn). For the sake of clarity, the parts of the metaphor are below:
      1. The root represents the patriarchs and God’s promises to them. God called Abraham and promised to make a great nation of him (Genesis 12:1-3).
      2. The natural branches represent the Jews, the descendants of Abraham and Sarah. Some of the natural branches were broken off while others remained. Faith makes the difference!
      3. The wild olive tree branches represent Gentiles. Some of those branches were grafted into the tree while others were not. Faith makes the difference!
   3. Thus, the metaphor represents “the people of God in the broadest sense of that concept – a people spanning both ages of salvation history and both major ethnic/religious groups, Jews and Gentiles.” (Douglas Moo)
2. **Paul used the metaphor to teach that there is still hope for Jews to be saved. (v. 16-17)** 
   1. In 11:1-15, Paul demonstrated that God was not finished with His people Israel! He will save any who will receive Jesus by faith.
   2. Israel’s beginning indicates that more will be saved (v. 16). If the first portion of the dough is holy, then the batch is as well. If the root is holy, the branches will be as well. The same God who justified Abraham by faith is the same who justified Paul by faith. Any believing Jew can be justified by faith.
   3. Some of the Jews are “broken off.” (v. 17a) Unbelief severed them from God’s blessings.
   4. Gentiles, represented by the wild olive tree, were grafted in. (v. 17b) The wild olive tree was widely known as an unfruitful tree. As such, it represented the unfruitfulness of the Gentiles regarding righteousness. The Gentile believers should be humble because their lives would be unfruitful except for the intervention of God. By placing faith in Christ and His finished work, they are blessed to be grafted into the people of God.
3. **He also used the metaphor to rebuke the pride of the Gentiles. (v. 18-24)**
   1. The Gentiles have no room to boast over the Jews. (v. 18) The word *boast* is defined as “a feeling of one's comparative superiority” (Friberg). The Gentile believers should not look down on the Jews. They needed Paul’s reminder that they do not support the root. Rather, the root supports them.
   2. Paul interacts with a hypothetical Gentile Christian to demonstrate that Gentiles should not view themselves as superior. (v. 19) Some believed the Jews were broken off that they might be grafted in.
   3. “Well” conveys, “You’re correct” or “Well said!” (v. 20a) However, Paul clarifies the statement. They were broken off due to unbelief. They had a place among the people of God, but unbelief forfeited their position. It was not because God loved the Gentiles more or that they were in any way superior. Jews have been cut off due to unbelief. Gentiles have been included because of their belief. Faith makes the difference! This has been the consistent message throughout Paul’s letter to the Romans. It is not one’s nationality, but faith in Jesus Christ that saves. “It is faith and faith alone – characterized by humility and receptivity – that is the only way to establish or maintain a relationship with God” (Douglas Moo).
   4. Access to salvation in Christ should not produce pride. Rather, it ought to produce reverent appreciation. (v. 20b)
   5. If God did not spare the natural branches (Israel) due to their unbelief, He would not spare Gentiles who remain in unbelief. (v. 21) This does not indicate that a person can lose their salvation. It means that all people have a place among the people of God, but forfeit that place by their own unbelief.
   6. The goodness and severity of God are constantly at work. (v. 22) The choices you make either move you in the direction of His goodness or His severity. The Gentiles needed to be reminded of this lest they think that they are above God’s judgement. That which has been true of Israel has also proven true with other nations.
      1. Israel’s rejection has consistently brought God’s judgment. Throughout the book of Acts the Jews’ rejection of the gospel left them condemned and led to the expansion of the gospel to the Gentiles.
      2. A brief survey of world history reveals that those nations that reject God remain under condemnation and eventually lose access to the gospel. They are cut off!
   7. If the Jews repent, God is able to graft them in again. (v. 23) This demonstrates that it is God’s desire to save the Jews. It is strictly their unbelief that keeps them disconnected to the tree.
   8. It stands to reason that they would be able to be grafted into their own olive tree. (v. 24)
4. **Central Idea: Paul rebuked the pride of Gentile believers because grace eliminates boasting.**
5. **Application: You should avoid all forms of pride because grace eliminates boasting.** 
   1. Are you a part of God’s family tree? Have you been born into God’s family? If not, by God’s grace you can be today!
   2. It is our tendency to think that we are better than others due to our position and/or performance. In what ways have feelings of being superior crept into your way of thinking?
   3. You should not view yourself or your race as superior to any other person or race. There is only one race: the human race. There is only one way to be saved: by grace! The ground is level at the foot of the cross! Beware of a condescending attitude toward those equally created in the image of God.

**Conclusion**

The Gentile believers needed the rebuke from the Apostle Paul. Thoughts of being superior to others do not fit our lives as Christians. A biblical understanding of grace will keep us humble and thankful. Think of others through this lens. Let grace eliminate the pride of your heart. Research your family tree as a believer. We are all sinners saved by grace!