

Romans 11:17-24

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[0 : 00] Please take out your copy of God's Word and turn to Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 11.!

And we did so in this way to talk and kind of to bring to some finality Paul's discussion of the Jews and what's happening with them now and what will eventually be the case for them.

And I don't have time to recap everything that I said last week, but essentially I showed in a pattern throughout chapter 11 that I believe in verse 26 when he says, And in this way all Israel will be saved, he's talking about the process by which his grace is still being extended to the people of Israel, to the nation of Israel.

That he is talking present day and that this grace has not left Israel as a nation, but that it has been extended to Gentiles as well as Jews.

And so his grace is running prevalent across the earth this day. Either way, the result's the same. Some believe that this text is talking about a final, full salvation of Israel.

[1 : 36] And we talked in brief about that. But either way, the point remains that what he's trying to say to Gentile believers, which I will presume that every single one of us are, is that we ought not be proud.

We ought not become haughty towards the Israelites. We ought not be anti-Semitic in any way whatsoever because it's by grace that we're saved. Not works, right?

It's not because we're Gentile that we now have the grace of God. And so I want to talk about that. I want to kind of rewind into chapter 11 and talk a bit more about that, focusing on verses 17 through 24 and particularly 20 through 22.

So let's pray together and then I'll begin reading that. Father God, I love you because you first loved me. And I thank you for the great grace that you've poured out on my life and on the lives of so many in this room.

Surely, us coming together this morning is a picture of your loving kindness toward mankind. I pray we don't miss that this morning. And Father, you know what a mess I am generally.

[2 : 45] And certainly this morning, frantic. Even with an extra hour in my day, I'm running around. And I just pray, Father, that you will work through my frailty by your Spirit.

That you will be powerful in me. And that you will work in the hearers of your word. That they might know and understand who you are. That they might serve you best this coming week.

And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Alright, so let's read together. Beginning in verse 17 through verse 24. But if some of the branches were broken off.

And you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others. And now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree. Do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root.

But the root that supports you. Then you will say, branches were broken off. So that I might be grafted in. That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief.

[3 : 45] But you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God.

Severity towards those who have fallen. But God's kindness to you. Provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. And even if they do not continue in their unbelief.

Will be grafted in. For God has the power to graft them in again. For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree. And grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree.

How much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree? So Paul uses this beautiful analogy of grafting.

And as I was thinking this week through the analogy. I actually thought about not talking about it at all. But then realized that there is a really good chance. That many of you have no idea what he's talking about.

[4 : 42] When he speaks of grafting. What that means. It's to cut off a branch. This happens in cultivation all the time.

You cut off a branch. And you take another branch. And you cut it in just such a way. I almost showed you guys a video of it happening today. But you cut it in just such a way. So that it can be inserted into the root, the tree, whatever that may be.

And it will then get its sustenance from the tree. And you will have then a new tree. The practice happens as farmers try to cultivate a better product.

So it happens with olives. Quite often, in fact. There's a trait in a wild olive that is beneficial. Let's say drought tolerance to the cultivated tree.

And so the farmer cuts and grafts in the other part. Now obviously in this case, he's not saying that in some way the Gentiles had something to offer to the kingdom of God.

[5 : 43] Therefore, they were a better version. And he needed to graft them into the old version.

But that's the picture that we're seeing here. Is that because of their unbelief, because of their unfruitfulness, parts of Israel were trimmed away.

And new, wild olive branches were grafted in. That they might bear fruit. And so here's the analogy that he gives us. And he calls us in this to humility.

And he does it three times in chapter 11. Look at verse 18. He says, Do not be arrogant toward the branches. Verse 20. So do not become proud, but fear.

Verse 25. He says, Lest you be wise in your own sight. Do not be haughty. Just because you're part of the tree now, do not be arrogant, proud, boastful, haughty towards those who have been cut off. And why? It's because you stand fast through faith. Faith. Not because of your works.

[6 : 49] Isn't that the great message of Romans? Justification by faith alone. Not because of works. Not because of anything we could have ever possibly done to earn God's favor.

But because of the faith that he has given us to believe in his son. Faith is the opposite of pride.

Thinking that we can somehow do anything is the opposite of faith.

Because faith in Jesus Christ, the son of God, the person and his work, his death and resurrection for us, brings nothing but humility.

It impedes pride. You cannot be proud if you truly believe in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

So faith then is set in juxtaposition to pride. And we stand fast through faith. So we see then in verse 20 through 22 that they were broken off because of their unbelief.

[7 : 52] But we stand fast through faith. So we shouldn't become proud. But instead, we should fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you.

Note then the kindness and the severity of God. The severity of those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you too will be cut off.

You see the warning here. Is that if we become proud, if we think that we have obtained our justification before God by our own doing, what does that mean?

We weren't Christians to begin with. Somehow, we made our way into the tree, but we too will be cut off. The analogy breaks down at that point, right?

But that is what he is saying. Truly regenerate believers, those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ, will not be proud. And he calls us to fear.

[8 : 57] And the challenge here is putting in proper balance fear and faith. Trembling, being in awe at the holiness of God.

And then believing that we can stand before him justified. There's a challenge in that. And it's a challenge that's talked about all throughout scriptures.

Turn with me, if you will, to Matthew chapter 20. This is a parable. Jesus is talking to a Jewish audience at this time. Those who had the privileges of the Old Testament, the prophets, the temple, the sacrificial system, had all these things giving them windows into the ultimate and final culmination of God's grace to mankind.

However, I don't want to find myself in this position. Verse 1, chapter 20. Jesus says, The kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.

After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, or a day's wage, he sent them into his vineyard. And going about the third hour, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace. And to them he said, You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right, I will give you a day's wage. [10:15] So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. And about the eleventh hour, he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, Why do you stand here idle all day?

They said to him, Because no one has hired us. He said to them, You go into the vineyard too. And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last up to the first.

And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more. But each of them also received a denarius.

And on receiving it, they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.

But he replied to one of them, Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Do you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you.

[11:15] Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity? So the last will be first, and the first last. And this is Paul's warning, just turned to the Gentile believers.

That we might see that God's grace to people is not deserved, but he pours it out because he's God. That we might not be proud in any way that we've received it, but that we pray for those who have not yet received it.

There's another great story, an Old Testament story, of who I don't want to be in the book of Jonah. Jonah is called and sent to go to the Ninevites, but yet he runs away.

And why does he run away onto a ship to Tarshish? Because he knows God is good. He knows God loves even the evil and wicked Ninevites.

He knows that if he goes proclaiming the judgment of God, that there's a good chance that God's going to pour out his grace on these people, who in his mind don't deserve it.

[12:26] And if that's the case, then he did. In his own mind, he was so proud to think that he deserved God's love toward him. And so in Jonah 3, 4, he says, Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey.

And this is the message he proclaimed. So when God finally swallowed him up in a big fish, spit him out onto the beach, he goes to Nineveh and he calls out, Yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

He goes proclaiming a message of God's wrath to the Ninevites. And then in 4, 1 and 2, it's recorded, But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry after the repentance of the whole city of Nineveh.

And he prayed to the Lord and said, O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish, for I knew that you were a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.

I don't want to have the heart of Jonah. I want to believe that God is a good and loving and kind God.

[13:35] I want to have that type of faith that properly balances in the case with fear. So we ought to have fear and faith in proper measure.

And you could put other words on that as well, like in our text, severity and kindness, mercy and wrath, justice and forgiveness.

You can put the two things anywhere you would like to in there, the words that you prefer. In this case, we see both fear and faith, as well as severity and kindness.

So what is the prescription that he gives to us to not be proud, to not be boastful, to not think in this way about those who have not yet received the grace of God?

He tells us to note. We're told to note the severity and kindness of God.

[14:36] Verse 22. Note then the kindness and the severity of God. That word note is most commonly translated in our scriptures as behold, look.

In the ESV, which is the translation I'm preaching from, it's found 1,061 times. Look, look, look.

Over and over and over again, which leads me to believe that God must think that we're not very good at seeing things. Right? Note, look, behold the kindness and the severity of God. And if we do this properly, we have no room to be proud. None. Whatsoever. Where do we do that? Where do we look? Where do we behold? How is it that we note this? From our scriptures. Isn't this the record of God's, both His severity and His kindness toward mankind?

[15 : 46] It all culminates, it all comes together, converges in the personal work of Christ as Christ bore the full wrath of God for the sins of the church, giving to them justification, giving to them the grace because of what He did.

It all comes together. We see that in the scriptures. the Bible in its entirety speaks of Christ. I challenge you in your reading of it to see that to be the case.

Shows us who we are and who God is. And that in the middle stands in that vast, vast, unfillable gap the one who could, Jesus Christ.

That is how we note. That is how we look. That's how we gaze upon the severity and the kindness of God.

Do you do that? Do you value your scripture? Do you read your scriptures? One of the great challenges of the American church is that we are biblically illiterate.

[16 : 52] We are at a place in American Christianity much like the days of the Reformation. Reformation. Recently, as a nation, we celebrated Halloween.

It's also known as Reformation Day. October 31st, 1517 is when Martin Luther nailed the 95 Theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg. That's when it happened.

October 31st. And what was happening at that time is that the church at large, the Catholic church, had led the people astray because the Bible was only written in Latin. In fact, the priests preached in Latin.

And nobody knew what was going on. In the same way, we now have the scriptures in our own language, in multiple translations with study notes.

Right? And yet, many people this morning sit across our country entirely biblically illiterate. A pastor can stand up and because of his position can say anything he wants and it's swallowed hook, line, and sinker.

[17 : 54] And many people are going to be dragged onto shore and they're going to die because he's not preaching the truth. God himself has penned words for our lives.

Why do we not read it more? Right now, our Sunday school class, the men's and the women's, are reading through the Bible in a year. And that has posed itself as a challenge for people to spend the time it takes to read the assigned reading to get through the entire Bible in a year.

I put myself in the same boat. I'm not judging you. Right? It can be a challenge. Can't it? We're so busy. We have so much going on.

Will you get less done if you read your scriptures more? Quite possibly. But I believe you'll get the right things done and they'll be done well if you read your scriptures more.

That you will be properly fueled by a proper balance of fear and faith, severity and kindness. Let me give you an example.

[19 : 05] If you've been around here long, you know that George Mueller is one of my heroes. A man who pastored a church in England as well as ran an orphanage.

Reached thousands and thousands. He ran a missionary society, funded all kinds of mission efforts around the world. In his last days, he spent his time traveling around the world.

An amazing man of faith. And this is where it kind of all rooted in. It was in his diligence in studying the scriptures. Four years after he became a believer, this was written of him by A.T.

Pearson, who wrote the best biography on him. It says, after a true relish for the scriptures had been created, he could not understand how he could ever have treated God's book with such neglect.

It seemed obvious that God, having condescended to become an author, inspired holy men to write the scriptures. He would in them impart the most vital truths.

[20 : 03] His message would cover all matters which concern man's welfare, and therefore, under the double impulse of duty and delight, we should instinctively and habitually turn to the Bible.

Moreover, as he read and studied this book of God, he felt himself admitted to more and more intimate acquaintance with the author. During the last 20 years of his life, he read it carefully through four or five times annually with a growing sense of his own rapid increase in the knowledge

of God thereby.

In the last 20 years of his life, George Mueller lived, I'm pretty sure, to the age of 92. At the age of 71, in his own writing and his journaling, he said that he had read the scriptures through a hundred times.

So in the last time of his year, it increased even, even more so. It's a great story of Mueller when he was a young Christian who went to a meeting and spoke about infant baptism.

You know, we're not on board with that here as a Baptist church. We're credo Baptists, and he spoke in defense of infant baptism and afterwards an old lady sitting in the group said to him, Mr. Mueller, I would encourage you to never speak on such a topic until you've searched the scriptures in regards to it.

[21 : 27] And he felt so pricked by that that he spent his studies from there reading the entire scriptures with baptism in mind. At the end of that process, he was a credo Baptist.

Praise God. As you should be. And he began a habit of doing that with any topic that vexed him. He would read the entirety of the scriptures with that topic in mind, trying to search the counsel of God in regards to that.

A man who loved the scriptures, read it through over 200 times in his life. And we're challenged to even get up and spend any time in the word of God in the morning.

It's worth the sacrifice. It's worth the sleep. It's worth putting something else off. You know what?

The dishes can stay dirty. We must know our scriptures to see these things in proper balance.

Fear and faith, severity and kindness. God proclaims his name when Moses is on Mount Sinai.

[23 : 04] He says, the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.

So in God's very presentation of his own character, he says, I am merciful, I am good, I am kind to thousands, I'm forgiving iniquity, I'm being gracious to sinners, yet, yet, I'm also wrathful, I'm vengeful, I will punish sin.

And we see the two things together, severity of God and his kindness. Matthew 10, 28-31, Jesus said, and do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul, rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your father, but even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows.

Interesting language. Jesus says, do not fear those who kill the body but can't kill the soul, rather, fear him, being God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

[24 : 37] The severity of God, right? Fear God. He can destroy you. That's what's due you because of your sin. He can destroy you.

But then look at the kindness. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny, and not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your father? Even the hairs on your head are numbered.

So, fear not the severity and the kindness of God. We are owed destruction. We were enemies of God, but now we're called his friends.

So, we ought to both fear and then be comforted by his kindness to us. Romans chapter 2. verses 4 and 5.

Paul wrote, Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance, but because of your hard and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

[25 : 50] Again, the kindness of God to us, meant to lead us to repentance, set against the wrath when God will judge the world and those who are not found in him.

So, it's a simple gospel message, right? The faith that should be preventing us from being proud.

We ought not be proud, but we should fear because if we continue in the kindness of God, we are his.

You see how the two things can live, exist together, that we can both fear him, but continue in his kindness, because we are his.

So, then how do those two things kind of press together? How do they increase? How do they cause us to live rightly? And this is the practical.

Number one, fear causes your faith in the kindness of God to grow. It causes your faith in the kindness of God to grow.

[27 : 07] Verse 22, provided you continue in his kindness, severity is meant to lead us to kindness. Understanding the weight of our sin leads us to understand the kindness of God to us in Jesus Christ.

It's a fear of mine that the church, that even our church, doesn't quite understand their just condemnation before they were justified by Christ.

That we think, well, I mean, I wasn't a good person, but I wasn't really a bad person. Compare me to the others around me. I was doing okay.

Many of us probably grew up in Christian homes. We were moral, but we were not righteous.

Understanding God's severity towards sinners, how much he hates sin, leads you to increase your faith in the kindness of God, cause you to hold fast to that love towards us.

I'm familiar with 1 John 4 18 that says, perfect love casts out fear. I know the text. I understand it. Do you?

[28 : 30] If there's a question in your mind, this side of heaven, this side of glory, none of us will experience love perfected. fear.

So fear will always play a part in our living. After our death, glorification, one day, it will no longer anymore, but for now, fear and faith must combine that our faith in the kindness of God will grow.

Number two, fear brings joy to our faith in the kindness of God. So if we're further believing that this is true, that the severity of God is what was due us, and yet the kindness of God is what we've received, we will find great joy in that.

The doxology found here at the end of chapter 11, which I'm looking forward to preaching on next week, we read the scriptures so horribly at times, and it's difficult, of course, to read tone and inflection into things.

I think we all experience that to be true with text messages. What did he mean by that? But the translators have helped us, they've given us punctuation, they've helped try to emphasize some things, and many people read this, oh the depth and the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments, and how inscrutable his ways.

[29 : 55] But they're ignoring the exclamation points on the end of this type of thing. Paul, as he's talked through us, this whole process introduced the doctrine of election to us in chapters 8 and chapters 9, and moving through what's going to eventually happen to his people, the people that he loves and desperately wants to see come to Christ, he finally at the end of all of that says, oh the depth of the riches and the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways, for who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor, or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid.

For from him and through him and to him are all things, to him be glory forever. Amen. I think that's how Paul would have read it.

Right? Moved to joy because he understood the severity of God, the fear that he should have in his relationship with God, and therefore he was moved to joy in the kindness of God.

God. And those two things, our faith increasing, our dependency on God, and our joy increasing in his kindness, should move our faith into action.

So fear, thirdly, fear moves our faith into action for the sake of others. For the sake of others. If you have wrapped your mind around, as much as you can, the severity of God towards sinners, sinners, you know that you stood in that place, but because of the justification of Christ, you no longer do, because you've experienced his kindness, you no longer do, it will grieve you that others still stand in that place.

[31 : 43] Knowing what their final destination is, knowing how severe the severity of God is going to be, he hates sin.

He's going to pour out his wrath on sinners. It's going to be bad. It's going to be really, really bad for those who don't have faith in Jesus Christ.

Understanding that should move our faith into action. How selfish of us, how Jonah-esque to sit on our hands and say, these people don't deserve the grace of God.

God, I deserved it. They don't deserve it. God is loving and kind and wants to pull people into his hand where he can hold them for eternity.

Fearing God's retribution, his wrath on those who don't know him ought to move us to share our faith. 2 Corinthians 5.11, Paul wrote, therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.

[32 : 59] Is that true of you this morning? Do you have a proper view of the fear of God and your faith, the severity and kindness?

righteousness? And are these things working themselves out into increasing your faith and bringing you great joy and moving your faith into action for others? If not, some self-examination is necessary.

Some time spent in the scriptures that you might see who God is and who you are and see that Christ comes in the middle of all of that.

Christ. It's a great adage. I can't remember who said this. I'll just take some credit for it this morning. We have been saved from God, by God, to God.

Isn't that good? We've been saved from God's wrath, by God's work in Jesus Christ, to God. He himself is the end goal of the gospel, that we might experience him, enjoy him, forever.

[34 : 09] Are you being shaped in this way as a Gentile believer? If not, let's pray together. Amen.