

Foreigners and Family

Thomas Robinson, *God's Amazing Paths 6*, November 6, 2016

Romans 11:5-24

⁵ So too at the present time there is a **remnant**, according to a **choice** that belongs to **grace**. ⁶ But if it's by **grace**, it's no longer on the basis of **works**; otherwise **grace** would no longer be **grace**.

⁷ What then? What Israel hoped for, didn't they obtain it? Those who shared in the **choice** obtained it, but the rest were hardened, ⁸ as it is written,

*"God gave them a spirit of stupor, **eyes** that would not see
and **ears** that would not hear ... down to this very day."* [Deut 29:4; Isa 29:10]

⁹ And David says,

*"Let their **table** become a snare and a trap,
a stumbling block and a retribution for them;
¹⁰ let their **eyes** be darkened so that they cannot see,
and bend their back forever."* [Psa 69:22-23]

¹¹ So I ask, they didn't **stumble** in order to **collapse**, did they? Certainly not! Rather, by their **trespass**, **salvation** is for the **nations** (Gentiles), so as to *provoke them to jealousy* [Deut 32:21].

¹² Now if their trespass means **riches** for the world, and if their defeat means **riches for Gentiles**, how much more will their **fullness** mean!

¹³ Now **I am speaking to you the nations** (Gentiles). Inasmuch then as I am an **apostle for Gentiles**, I glorify my ministry ¹⁴ in order somehow to make my "**flesh**" jealous/zealous, and thus **save some of them**. ¹⁵ For if their rejection is **reconciliation** of a world, what will their acceptance be if not **life from the dead**?

¹⁶ If the **firstfruits** are holy, so is the whole batch, and if the **root** is holy, so are the **branches**.

¹⁷ But if some of the **branches were broken off**, and you, although a **wild olive shoot**, were **grafted in** among them and now share in the **nourishing root** of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not boast over the branches. If you do, remember that it's not you who support the root, but **the root that supports you**.

¹⁹ Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that **I myself** might be grafted in."

²⁰ Very well. They were broken off by **unbelief**, but you stand fast by **faith**. So do not become proud, but fear. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. ²² Note then the **kindness** and the **severity of God**: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness upon you, if you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. ²³ But even they, if they do not continue in the **unbelief**, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. ²⁴ For if you were cut 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.

Deuteronomy 29:4

⁴ But to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear.

Deuteronomy 32:21 LXX

²¹ They have made me jealous with what is no god; they have provoked me to anger with their idols. So I'll provoke them to jealousy over a non-nation; with a foolish nation I'll make them angry.

Romans 10:19

¹⁹ But I ask, did Israel not understand? It's Moses who first says, "*I'll provoke you to jealousy over a non-nation; with a foolish nation I'll make you angry.*" [Deut 32:21]

Romans 1:14-16

¹⁴ I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵ So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. ¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Ephesians 2:13-16

¹³ But now in Messiah Jesus you (Gentiles), who once were far off, have been brought near in the blood of the Messiah. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made both one and has broken down the dividing wall – the hostility – in his flesh ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might in himself create the two into one new human being so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

Tensions in a Diverse Community

In building a community, there are basic principles, and also particular problems that arise. The church in Rome likely started after Pentecost (ad 30) as the “*visitors from Rome, Jews and proselytes*” (Acts 2:10) who became believers returned home (25 yrs before Romans, ad 56). Many Roman Jews were from freed slave families, from Pompey's conquests a century earlier, not citizens. In c. ad 49 emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome because of conflicts over the new faith (Aquila & Priscilla, Acts 18:2). Claudius died ad 54. Jews returned. The church had been non-Jewish (Gentile) and now has returning leaders. How is all this supposed to play out. Some Gentiles said God rejected the Jews and brought in Gentiles.

Paul, the Pharisee who became apostle to Gentiles, wants to deal with the issue. Not just with practical advice but by understanding the whole narrative of Scripture and their place in it. He has worked with many of the returning Jews and is committed to the nations/Gentiles.

The Troublesome Grace that Makes New People

People were familiar with scattered ethnic groups – Jews, Germans, Egyptians, Phoenicians, Ethiopians, etc., living in ethnic enclaves or assimilating. There was a pattern. But Christian communities didn't fit. One of the main themes of Romans is how God has exploded those ethnic, cultural, class, gender, wealth divides. All are broken sinners in need of new life.

That life is given not by ethnic identity marked by distinct practices, but through God's grace embodied in Jesus, a man in time, a Jew, son of David, Messiah, Adam, resurrection life, giver of Spirit, God! Jews were called as a “*light to the nations*,” but mostly saw that as light scattered in Gentile darkness. Jesus says that God wants to include all peoples he created.

Israel's national/ethnic identity became a focus of failure, crisis, a blindness, a trap, Paul says.

Jews knew the prophets spoke of a “remnant” (Isa 10:2, Rm 9:27), but that seemed a pure segment within the ethnic group (Pharisees, Essenes). Now the temptation is for Gentiles to repeat the familiar pattern of ethnic identity and conflict in reverse: God chose me not you. Grace affirms peoples' real identities but breaks down all identities as boundary barriers.

Wild Olive Branches and the Ever-Unfolding Story

Paul uses the strange illustration of olive grafting. In reverse of good olive cultivation, God has grafted wild branches (known for poor, inedible olives) onto cultivated trunks and roots.

That is the grace of a God who calls everyone, foreigners, family, of every status, into a new humanity of transforming love. He has not rejected Jews in favor of Gentiles; he calls all!

But that transforming grace/love challenges and changes the Roman, Egyptian, New Yorker, just as much as it ever challenged Israel. It remakes thought (faith) and action (love) to give life.