

BIBLE & BAGEL

Romans – Our Common Faith

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As we proceed in our study of Romans, we see Apostle Paul warning the Gentile believers in Rome not become arrogant towards the Jewish members, both believing and unbelieving. This is the crux of the matter and the reason for him writing this letter to them. What should our attitude be towards the Jewish people; read on ...

Romans 11:19-24

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?

Apostle Paul foresees the argument that the Gentile believers would make; that the Jews (natural branches) have been disobedient to the gospel and have not believed and therefore were cut off and we have been grafted-in, in their place. He says that they are right in that assumption but warns them at the same time that if God can cut off the natural branches for unbelief then, He can also remove the grafted-in branches for the same reason. He tells them to consider both the goodness and severity meaning the seriousness or strictness of God. He points out to them that those who fell by unbelief experienced God's severe judgment but those who were faithful experienced His goodness but warns that believers must remain faithful.

Pointing back to the illustration of being grafted-in, he says that if God can graft Gentiles who were branches from a wild tree into His nurtured tree surely He is able to graft them back into their own tree if they come to faith.

This argument about Israel's unfaithfulness is still being used today by those who espouse what is called "replacement theology", a teaching that says that we (non-Jewish believers) have replaced the Jews in God's plan. This kind of thinking brings about pride saying that we are better than the Jews which is exactly the thinking that Apostle Paul was refuting. We must always bear in mind the illustration of the two Olive trees and where we came from, we were originally part of the wild tree; practically good-for-nothing, but because God grafted us into His nurtured tree, the commonwealth of Israel as he calls it in the book of Ephesians, we now became branches that bear fruit.

We must not become proud of the natural branches that were cut off, instead we should be grateful to them; because they were cut-off we now have life and are able to be fruitful. We must also pray for them that they would come to faith so that God will graft them back into their olive tree.



Romans 11:25-32

*25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; 27 For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins."**

28 Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. 29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30 For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, 31 even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. 32 For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all. NKJV

Apostle Paul now explains why God partially blinded the Jewish people i.e. some believed while others did not; He did it so that the non-Jews would turn to God and be saved. The Gentiles need to remember that it was through the Jewish people that they had received salvation; he quotes from Isaiah to prove his point.ⁱ

Then he speaks about the Jews who oppose the gospel and those even who persecute the believers; he says that even though these are enemies of the gospel God still loves them because of the "Fathers" meaning the covenants which He made with the patriarchs. He says that the Gentiles were disobedient to God but because of the failure of the Jews they received mercy from God. Likewise through the mercy that God has shown the Gentiles, the Jews also would receive His mercy and so He will have mercy on all.

Today a large portion of the church is still unaware of the debt we owe to Israel. God set them aside so that we could be saved, we must never forget that and never take the prideful view that we are better than the Jews. Yes they have their failures and yes they did and some still do persecute the believers, in today's context Jewish believers, yet God still loves them and has not taken away their calling as some believe, Apostle Paul says it very clearly in verse 28 and 29.

God is a merciful God and wants to show his mercy to all, Jew and Gentile alike we need to be ambassadors of His mercy especially towards the Jews so as we pray for Israel pray that they would experience the mercy of God that would bring them to faith.

ⁱ Isaiah 59:20-21

