

Session 66: The Two Olive Trees, Continued

(Note: Mike refers to this under the old system as Establishment, Part 8, Session 66)

In our previous session we were discussing the two olive trees: the good olive tree and the wild olive tree.

As a context, remember to whom Paul is speaking when he gives the illustration of the two olive trees: Gentiles. While practically all of what Paul writes in Romans to Philemon is to saved Gentiles, in this dispensation of Gentile grace, this is one exception to the rule. Here, Paul is talking to every Gentile.

Romans 11:13 *For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:*

And why is Paul speaking to every Gentile? Because that is who has now been grafted into the good olive tree.

As we work our way through the passage, note the pronouns and identify who is being referred to.

Romans 11:16 *For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches. ¹⁷ And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; ¹⁸ Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. ¹⁹ Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. ²⁰ Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: ²¹ For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. ²² 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. ²³ And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again. ²⁴ For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?*

(Mike goes off notes for the most part for the remainder of recording and just discusses good and wild olive tree and who they represent, Israelite or Gentile, with only brief reference to the actual notes. Addition pages have been provided at end of Session 67 for more personal notes and reflection.)

Being grafted into the tree was not about being saved. According to verse 20, the unbelieving part of Israel was in that tree. They continued to be part of the cultivated, cared for, and nurtured tree, of God's goodness and mercy until the day in which they were eventually broken off.

How long did God work with, care for, and nurture the nation of Israel? He did from the time of Abraham all the way to the stoning of Stephen.

- Abraham entered Canaan 1921 B.C.
- Stephen was stoned around 36 A.D.
- That makes the total time of Israel being grafted into the good olive tree almost 2000 years (1957 to be precise).

Were there any unbelieving Israelites during that time? Of course, but God did not break off those unbelieving branches until after the promised extension of mercy was over.

Paul is still not talking about salvation when verse 20 ends with "thou standest by faith." Who is Paul talking to here? He is talking to every Gentile. Well, all Gentiles are not 'standing by faith' in the sense that they are saved. The "faith" in verse 20 cannot refer to 'saving faith.'

***Romans 11:20** Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear:*

We know it cannot be referring to saving faith because not everyone who was grafted into the good olive tree is saved. And we know that because there will come a time when God will not spare these grafted in branches (verse 21) and these branches will also be cut off (verse 22).

And which of those grafted in branches will be cut off? Obviously, it will be the unbelieving ones, just as before. It will be the Gentiles which have despised the *goodness of God*.

***Romans 11:13** For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:*

I want to say a word about the idea that because Paul uses the olive tree then he means to say that we Gentiles are now part of Israel.

It has always been that God's chosen people are separate from the Gentile nations. Israel is the circumcision and we are the uncircumcision. Israel was set apart from the other nations of the world. Israel was not to be numbered among the nations of the world.

Space for personal reflection and notes

Session 67: Two Olive Trees, Continued

(Note: Mike refers to this under the old system as Establishment, Part 8, Session 67)

In the last session we were talking about the two olive trees (good and wild) that did not follow your notes. I think I can get back on mark with the notes.

Ephesians 2:11 *Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; ¹² That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;*

The point is that we Gentiles never were a part of Israel. We were on the other side of the “middle wall of partition,” we were without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants made with Israel, and far off.

Keep all of that in mind and think about this.

What does Paul mean when he says that we Gentiles were branches in a wild olive tree? It means that we were uncultivated, uncared for, mal-nourished, etc. It means no husbandman was taking care of us.

Moreover, what does that all mean in the reality of our time past condition of being Gentiles? It means that God was not working with us. God was not providing anything for us. Christ did not come for us. The covenants did not apply to us.

Hence, what does it mean when Paul talks about a “good olive tree

Romans 11:24 *For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?*

Romans 11:18 *Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.*

The “good olive tree” is the tree of God’s care and provision. This tree has a “husbandman” to look after it. And what does all of that mean to Israel as being the branches in the good olive tree. It means that for almost two thousand years God was working with them, providing for them,

and caring for them. On what basis was he doing that? It was though his mercy and goodness: his grace.

What is the basic difference between the two trees? One is uncared for while the other is nurtured. But notice this: they are both olive trees. Paul never says they are two different kind of olive trees; he only says that one is cared for while the other is not.

If someone insists that the tree is Israel because it is an olive tree, then actually both trees are Israel! Either you have to say that Gentiles were actually Israel all along which they were not as they were distinct and separate from Israel. Or, you must concede that in this case (as in others) the type of tree being referred to: 1) is not referring to Israel and 2) is not the central issue of the passage.

Therefore, we should not get fixated on the tree being an olive tree, for that is not the main focus of the illustration. I have already told you that Paul could have used another type of fruit tree to make the grafting illustration. The olive tree is not the only kind of fruit tree in which can be grafted.

The main purpose of the illustration is to demonstrate that if God can stop what he is doing with national Israel in order to show mercy and goodness to Gentiles for a time, it is just as easy (and in fact more natural) for him to one day return to his dealings with national Israel, resume their program and complete his purpose with them.

***Romans 11:23** And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴ For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?*

Paul's use of the olive tree in Romans 11 is not meant to make us think that the tree is Israel and since we are grafted into the olive tree, then we must now be Israel (or some part of Israel.)

It would make no sense for God to break Israel off of Israel, to graft Gentiles into Israel so they could be Israel, only to wind up breaking them off and putting Israel back into Israel. (Think about it.)

Gentiles being grafted into the olive tree is demonstrating the present favorable treatment of Gentiles who were without hope during Israel's program. During this dispensation of Gentile grace, Gentiles wind up benefitting from the same root of this tree of God's goodness and mercy.

***Romans 11:17** And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;*

Space for personal reflection and notes

Session 68: Identifying the Faith

(Note: Mike refers to this under the old system as Establishment, Part 8, Session 68)

(Mike starts by saying this was covered in last session, however, it was not so notes will begin here.)

There are three issues we need to either cover or clarify before we leave this illustration and do our recap of the passage: 1) the issue of verse 16, why Paul is using that; what bearing does it have on the illustration of the olive trees, 2) the issue contained at the end of verse 20, “thou standest by faith” and 3) the issue of the warnings in verses 21-22.

Let us take the first one.

Romans 11:16 *For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches.*

The tree, at its root, is the tree of God’s goodness (verse 17 – root and fatness; verse 22 – the goodness of God, toward thee goodness) and mercy (verse 30-32).

But what does verse 16 have to do with this? The first part of the verse sets the principle of what is holy (set apart unto God). The issue in the last part of the verse takes that principle and says that if the root of a tree is holy, then every branch, by extension, is also holy.

What is that saying in this context?

It is saying that God does not have to look at the branches as being unholy which would mean that he cannot bring them back or that he cannot utilize them again. The issue is that God can utilize them; because, whatever he plugs into that tree becomes an extension of the root, and verse 16 tells us the root is holy!

Paul is showing us that the provision for Israel’s restoration has already been provided. He is showing us that Israel’s restoration is more easily done and more natural than what he did with us Gentiles. It is on that concept that Paul then gives us the olive tree illustration in verse 17.

Let us look at issue number two: the issue of faith in Romans 11:20, focusing on the phrase “thou standest by faith.” We begin by reading in verses 18-21. Notice the general focus of these verses.

Romans 11:18 *Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. ¹⁹ Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. ²⁰ Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and*

thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: ²¹ For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.

The gist of these verses is to warn Gentiles about two things:

1. A boastful attitude toward the broken off branches
2. Highminded thinking about ourselves

Before we concern ourselves with the “faith” in the verse, it is necessary to define what it means when it says that Gentiles “standest.” I am going to disagree with the common view that this describes our standing in Christ. My reason for that is because Paul has been talking to all the Gentiles (verse 13) who were grafted into the good olive tree.

If you recall, being grafted into the tree was not the same as being saved. There were unbelieving Israelites in that tree for many centuries. Since salvation is now come unto the Gentiles (Romans 11:11) every Gentile has been given the opportunity to be saved: to be a recipient of God’s goodness and mercy. Since every Gentile is grafted in during this dispensation of Gentile grace, the only Gentiles which have a ‘standing in Christ’ would be the saved ones. Clearly, not every Gentile is saved, which means not every Gentile has a standing in Christ. Therefore, the “standest” in verse 20 does not refer to our “saved” standing in Christ.

Every Gentile does have a different *standing* in the sense that they are no longer “far off, without God and without hope.” There is no more middle wall of partition that separates us off from God.

If we are no longer in the position we were previously in, then our standing before God has changed. Again, this is not talking about our standing in Adam as opposed to our standing in Christ. Those are standings that have to do with our salvation (or lack of it).

The standing that has changed is that we Gentiles used to be in that wild olive tree which God was not caring for and cultivating. Now, we have been grafted into the tree of God’s goodness and mercy; whereby, we have God directly working with us to offer us salvation and all that comes with it.

In keeping with the illustration, our standing is now in the “good olive tree.” Our previous standing was in the “wild olive tree.” That is what Paul is talking about when we says that we Gentiles “standest” by faith; our standing is that of a branch that is a partaker of the root and fatness of the good olive tree. It is not about being saved, it is about God now dealing with us.

With that in mind, let us examine the entire phrase in verse 20: “and thou standest by faith.”

Romans 11:19 *Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. ²⁰ Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear:*

The “faith” mentioned here is usually understood to refer to ‘saving faith.’ Well, if the “standest” referred to our saved standing in Jesus Christ, then the “faith” would certainly be ‘saving faith.’ Since Paul is talking to Gentiles in general, and not all Gentiles are saved, then the “standest” cannot refer to a saved standing in Jesus Christ. That would also mean that the “faith” cannot be referring to ‘saving faith.’ Why? Because every Gentile who was grafted in is not saved and that is the group Paul is referring to in verse 20.

Just about everyone thinks of the “faith” of verse 20 this way: the Gentiles are grafted in because they earned or deserved it, because, they produced fruit which merited their inclusion into the good olive tree. No, the Gentiles occupy that status by faith and not by works. I would agree with those statements, however, I just do not believe that to be what Paul is expressing in verse 20.

It has been said ‘anything that Gentiles have, is by faith and not by works.’ I agree with this 100%. The Gentiles’ standing, in the good olive tree, is not because we earned it or deserved it in any way. And, it is by faith, but I do not think all Gentiles were grafted into the good olive tree because of their faith, but because of the “faith of Christ.”

As you can see, what we think about “faith” depends on how we define “standest.” If I am correct in defining the “standest” as the Gentiles’ changed standing in the good olive tree, then the “faith” cannot be saving faith. In fact, the faith cannot belong to the Gentiles at all. (If Paul is only talking to saved Gentiles, as he did in 2 Corinthians 1:24, then I could see their faith being the basis for the standing in Christ, but again, I do not think this is case.)

Mike concludes session by explaining his view of “standing in faith” and standing in Christ, how we use to be and how we are now, for which he is in the minority and how he handles that issues with his brothers in Christ.

Space for personal reflection and notes