

Romans

Dr. Charles "Buddy" Parrish
March 19, 2025
Romans 11:13-24



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Vss. 13-15

- Paul now turns his attention to the Gentiles. While he is primarily writing this Letter to the Romans to the Jews in the church, he never forgets that God has called him to be an Apostle to the Gentiles.
- He points out to the Gentiles that a secondary purpose of God's work for their salvation was to make the Jews "jealous". The idea here is that if the Jews can see in the Gentiles what real salvation is, what life with the true Messiah is like, then they too will want that same life. This is true of course not just with the Jews, but with anyone who is lost when they compare their lives with the lives of those who live out the life of joy that comes from being a disciple of Christ. "Why is my life so _____ and yours is not? How can I get what you have?"
- That the Jews would accept Christ and know true salvation was Paul's greatest hope. His greatest concern was that their rejection of Christ amounted to nothing more than reconciliation and identification with the world, leading to separation from Christ. Their acceptance of Christ as Savior would mean to move out of death and into life. This is why Jesus called the Pharisees "whited sepulchers" (Matthew 23:27). They were already dead, as is everyone who is apart from Christ. So to be saved in Christ is to pass out of death and into life.

Vss. 16-24

- In vs. 16 Paul explores a new idea using two word pictures that both his Gentile and Jewish readers (and our grandparents) would well understand: baking and gardening.
- In practical terms, if you put leaven in the first small lump of dough and then add it to the larger lump, the leaven from the first smaller lump will leaven the whole bigger lump, which everyone who bakes regularly would know. In spiritual terms that the Jews would understand, as you are beginning your baking, in the Book of Numbers (15:19-20) we are told that the first part of the dough is to be offered to God, consecrated, and when that was accomplished then the whole lump became sacred. Offering the first part made the whole bread holy to God. Thus it was not necessary to consecrate every bit and bite as you went along. Sanctifying the first part sanctified the whole.
- The point here that Paul is making is that the Jews were that first part and the Gentiles the second larger part. He didn't want the Gentiles, who now held a vast majority in the church and who were

remaking the church to fit their own culture, to ever forget that they came to faith in Christ because of the Jews. It's was the Jews to whom Christ came. It was as a Jew that Christ lived. It was Jews that were the first disciples and wholly comprised the first church. It was Jews like Paul and Barnabas and others who brought the Gospel to the Gentiles. The Gentiles were "leavened", as it were, by the Jews.

- The second word picture is from the olive tree arbor. Paul divides the church into cultivated and wild olive trees, the Jews being the cultivated trees that God has been grooming and trimming and watering for a long time. The Gentiles are the wild olive trees that on their own do not grow well nor do they produce good fruit. This is a powerful picture for the Jews, for the olive tree, like the lion, has always been a symbol of Israel as the bald eagle and Uncle Sam have been for America.
- So Paul wants the Gentiles to keep a humble perspective, for they did not come from the root, they were grafted on the cultivated trees in order to be incorporated into God's arbor.
- Finally, a word of warning that sounds very much like James' words on faith and works (James 2:14-26 – "Faith without works is dead") and Jesus' words from the Upper Room in John 15:1-6. Jesus says that the branches that do not bear fruit will be cut off and thrown into the fire. Here too Paul is saying that now that the wild olives have been grafted in, by their belief they must bear fruit otherwise they too will cut off. If Jesus will trim the fruitless Jewish branches, how easily will He trim the fruitless Gentile branches? No one can just sit on having their ticket punched. The Jews felt it was enough to be a child of Abraham and Moses. Too many church people feel that it is enough to have been baptized. But faith without works is dead...and so is the one who bears no fruit and thus will be cut off.
- But like the prophets of old, Paul ends this line of thought with hope. Perhaps you have been cut off, but as long as you have breath there is hope, for those who have been cut off "God is able to graft them in again" (vs.23). Maybe you were baptized once and fell away from the church, fell away from your faith, but if like the Prodigal Son, you at some point turn your face back to the Father, He will receive you again, graft you in again, and make you again His own, for His mercies are from everlasting to everlasting.