



(For access to all available commentaries and sermons of Charlie's click [HERE](#))

Romans

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

Firstfruit... lump... root... branches? Paul was just talking about Israel's being cast away and then returned to favor. What is the connection?

"For" - This is a different conjunction than verse 15. It is actually two words which carry the idea of "if moreover." He is adding to his previous thought and expanding on it. The imagery he will use is meant to show, with all certainty, that even though Israel was cast away, their return is assured; they are not utterly rejected.

And so, in order to substantiate this in a metaphorical way, Paul goes directly to the law which established Israel in the first place and he pulls out examples which actually verify that this is how God works. First he says, "if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy." The concept of the "firstfruit" is a portion of something, such as grain or fruit, being offered to God. This portion then represents the whole. In the case of "the lump" a portion of the first dough which was made into bread after the harvest was cut off and offered to God. This is found in Numbers 15:18-21 -

"When you come into the land to which I bring you, then it will be, when you eat of the bread of the land, that you shall offer up a heave offering to the Lord. You shall offer up a cake of the first of your ground meal as a heave offering; as a

heave offering of the threshing floor, so shall you offer it up. Of the first of your ground meal you shall give to the Lord a heave offering throughout your generations."

This "heave offering" is comparable to the "firstfruits." If a portion of the lump is cut off and offered to God, which is then accepted as "holy," then the whole offering becomes sanctified and is holy as well; the sacred portion makes the whole sacred. Bread is bread, but when a portion of a lump is deemed holy, then the whole lump is holy.

The second thought from Paul is that "if the root is holy, so are the branches." Again, he has gone to the law to use a real precept to make a connection in how things work in spiritual matters. In Leviticus 19:23-25, the following is found -

"When you come into the land, and have planted all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as uncircumcised. Three years it shall be as uncircumcised to you. It shall not be eaten. But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, a praise to the Lord. And in the fifth year you may eat its fruit, that it may yield to you its increase: I am the Lord your God."

A sapling may be planted anytime by anybody and in any location and it is just a sapling like any other. But in the land of Israel, a sapling is made holy when it is dedicated to God. If it is holy in its roots, which receive the water and nutrients from God's land and His provision, then it is holy in its trunk, in its branches, in its sap, and in its fruit. The holiness permeates the plant.

In these two examples, which follow directly after his note concerning Israel, the intent is to tell us that the Jewish people, as a whole, have been set apart to God. If a portion of them has been sanctified as holy, then the whole is holy. This does not in any way imply that they are all saved, as he will note in the coming verses, but that the people, as a whole, are used for God's purposes.

In support of this, Paul will use Jeremiah 11:6 as a basis for verses 16-24 -

"The Lord called your name,
Green Olive Tree, Lovely and of Good Fruit.
With the noise of a great tumult
He has kindled fire on it,
And its branches are broken."

The dough and the tree are that which is holy. Each received its holiness from God. When a portion was deemed holy, the whole became holy. Psalm 105:6-15 shows this process. Abraham was selected and set apart by God. From him, that line went through Isaac and then to Jacob. From Jacob, all twelve sons received the sanctification; a collective group of people set apart by God for His service. As Christ is the fulfillment of the promises through this line, then those who are brought into Christ by faith are thus sanctified and made holy also.

Life application: 1 Corinthians 6:11 says that, in Christ you were washed, you were sanctified, and you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. If you are thus made holy, it is incumbent on you to act in a manner worthy of this sacred calling and state.

And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree,... Romans 11:17

From the symbolism of this verse, if from nothing else, it should be evident that the church has not replaced Israel. The tree is symbolizing the faith of Abraham and the spiritual covenant blessings associated with that. If individual branches are individual believers but which represent the whole, as must be the case here, then these spiritual blessings can be given to different types of branches on the same tree.

The Bible makes it clear that there is now no distinction between Jew and gentile when in Christ. This is speaking of the benefit of being in Christ, not the individual who is in Christ. In other words, the terms "Jew" and "gentile" indicate a difference in individual. Likewise, different types of branches indicate a difference in nature.

Paul uses this symbolism to show us that "some of the branches were broken off." From the surrounding context, this is certainly speaking of the disbelieving Jews. They failed to accept the work of God in Christ, and they were cast off as rejected branches. This has opened space for the gentiles. Paul, speaking to the gentiles in this portion of his letter, says "you." This is only speaking of gentiles who, "being a wild olive tree" are not the same as the Jew (in individual nature, not spiritual benefit - as will be seen).

The gentile converts are not a part of the holy tree by nature. They are distinct and separate from it. However, nature when combined with wisdom in gardening allows something to occur apart from the natural order of things. Wild branches can be grafted into cultivated trees. The reason for grafting, as was discovered many millennia ago, is that certain trees are hardier than other trees. They can withstand harsher climates, defend against bugs, produce a variety of tastes within the same fruit type, etc.

The hardy spiritual tree - that of the spiritual blessings which came through Abraham, has "natural branches" from the line of promise: Isaac, Jacob, and the sons of Israel. However, at select times prior to Christ's coming, such as the Moabite Ruth, and more especially since Christ's advent, something unusual and wonderful has happened. Wild branches have been "grafted in among them."

Any believing gentiles, by faith in the promises of Christ, "became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree." So there, on the one tree of spiritual nourishment, are branches of different types and which will produce a variety of traits while being sustained by the same life-giving sap. Again, as noted above, this doesn't show a "replacement" but an "addition." The gentiles are grafted into

the commonwealth of Israel's spiritual blessings because these blessings flow from the holy root, not because the gentiles have replaced Israel.

Life application: Through faith in God's provision, all are one in the Messiah. Let us thank God for the immense blessing and honor of eternal life, granted because of the work of our Lord Jesus.

...do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. Romans 11:18

It's common for us to actually rejoice over the fall of others, especially when we have enmity towards them for whatever reason. When our political party wins, we often take as much pleasure in the loss of the other party or candidate as we do in the win we participate in. Seeing a rival sports team get smacked is a pleasure to many, even if that team is playing someone other than the team they support. It is a perverse side of humanity to revel in the downfall of others, but it is a common occurrence.

Paul had a concern that the gentiles would "boast against the branches" which were the Jews who had fallen; the branches that were "broken off" in the previous verse. They may feel justified because it was the Jews who had rejected their Lord and participated in His crucifixion. The question "How could they be so stupid?" must have been a common sentiment at the time. "We figured it out and we don't even have your law or heritage!"

But Paul has already shown that "through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles." How could one boast over such a thing? Rather, they should have remorse and work to evangelize the very people who were now out of favor. Even more, such boasting was something that showed a complete lack of thought concerning the state of those broken off Jews as well as their own personal state. To demonstrate this, Paul reminded them that, "if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you."

The root is the spiritual heritage which established both the Jews as well as the gentiles. There is one continuous tree by which salvation is derived. The gentiles have been grafted in to this tree while the Jews were derived directly from it. Understanding this, and the fact that salvation is dependent on the spiritual heritage found in the tree, he will make the point in the coming verse that boasting is not a well thought through approach to the situation. In fact, it is contrary to sound reason.

Life application: In the church, we may feel that we are superior to the Jews who sit in their synagogues and ignore the Lord who came from them and who is the fulfillment of their Scriptures. We aren't superior. Rather, we recognized what they missed and we received it by grace through faith. We may have access to the truth, but we are no better than they are. Instead of sitting smugly and boasting over the lost, we need to evangelize them in hopes of opening their eyes. In the case of the Jews, we should make a double effort. As the natural branches of the olive tree, their conversion to Christ can have a most important impact on the continuance of the spreading of the gospel.

**You will say then, “Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.”
Romans 11:19**

Paul just told the audience not to boast against the branches and he gave the reason for it - because they are supported by the same root that the broken off branches were supported by. But in the typical way of not clearly thinking an issue through, they may propose that they are somehow better, or more favored, than the branches which had been broken off. And so Paul preempts such thinking, "You will say then..."

His introduction of this statement shows that he understands and anticipates this type of dialogue. He was trained in rabbinical studies which would have included the study in argumentation for and against a matter. One method would be to introduce a thought prior to the opponent and then to dismantle it. This would leave the thought harder to defend. Politicians are often good at such pre-emptive strikes. This is Paul's approach here.

The argument: "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." In essence, "I have replaced that which was removed from the support of the root; therefore, they must not be worthy of that support, but I am." This type of thinking hasn't looked at the entire scenario. God is working in and through humanity and only He sees the end from the beginning. With the Bible complete, we have the overall plan, but we still don't see the details. As time unfolds, the details come with it and we can more clearly see what is actually happening.

Paul, however, has been trained by the Lord (Galatians 1:15-17) and knows much of the plan in advance. Therefore, he can rightly argue against faulty views and he can instruct the church more appropriately in matters related to faith.

Life application: We have the general overview of what God intends in redemptive history, but the details are often lacking. As history reveals these details, we may need to reconsider our viewpoint. This is something that is very hard to do for several reasons, but pride of opinion is generally the root of each of them. When history caught up with the plans of the Bible and Israel was restored to her land, the thinking of the church should have changed to accommodate what had occurred, but for many there is an unwillingness to see the truth of the matter. What is coming does include Israel and therefore we need to not fight against God in the process.