

May 19

Lesson 12 (NIV)

## CALLED TO MUTUAL ACCEPTANCE

**DEVOTIONAL READING:** [Romans 10:5–13](#)

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** [Romans 11](#)

### ROMANS 11:11–24

<sup>11</sup> Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. <sup>12</sup> But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!

<sup>13</sup> I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry <sup>14</sup> in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. <sup>15</sup> For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? <sup>16</sup> If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.

<sup>17</sup> If some of the branches have been

broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, <sup>18</sup> do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. <sup>19</sup> You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” <sup>20</sup> Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. <sup>21</sup> For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

<sup>22</sup> Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. <sup>23</sup> And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. <sup>24</sup> After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

### KEY VERSE

*Do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this:*

*You do not support the root, but the root supports you.—Romans 11:18*

## DISCIPLESHIP AND MISSION

### Unit 3: Call to Life in Christ

LESSONS 10–13

#### LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Describe the components of Paul’s analogy of the olive trees.
2. Explain the inclusive nature of God’s grace.
3. Repent of self-congratulatory pride.

#### LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. “It’s Complicated”
  - B. Lesson Context: Paul, Jews, and Gentiles
  - C. Lesson Context: Olive Trees
- I. Result of Stumble (ROMANS 11:11–15)
    - A. Provoking to Jealousy (vv. 11, 12)
    - B. Pushing for Emulation (vv. 13–15)
  - II. Outcome of Brokenness (ROMANS 11:16–21)
    - A. Partaking of Fatness (vv. 16–18)
    - B. Grafting by Faith (vv. 19–21)
- Grafting Today*

III. Possibility of Restoration (ROMANS 11:22–24)

A. Continuing in Goodness (vv. 22, 23)

*Rebellion and Restoration*

B. Regrafting onto God’s Tree (v. 24)

Conclusion

A. Grace Is Always Prior to Salvation

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

#### HOW TO SAY IT

Andronicus	An-dro- <b>nye</b> -kus.
Antioch	An-tee-ock.
Barnabas	Bar-nuh-bus.
Corinthians	Ko-rin-thee-unz ( <i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i> ).
Ephesians	Ee-fee-zhunz.
Galatians	Guh-lay-shunz.
Gamaliel	Guh-may-lih-ul or Guh-may-lee-al.
Gentiles	Jen-tiles.
Jotham	Jo-thum.
Junia	Joo-ni-uh.
Leviticus	Leh-vit-ih-kus.
Matthias	Muh-thigh-us ( <i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i> ).
synagogue	sin-uh-gog.

## Introduction

### A. “It’s Complicated”

A Bible-knowledge quiz might ask this seemingly straightforward question: “How many apostles were there?” Many would quickly respond “12.” That familiar answer is based on Gospel texts such as [Matthew 10:2](#); [Mark 3:14](#); and [Luke 6:13](#).

A better answer is “it’s complicated.” After Matthias replaces Judas ([Acts 1:25, 26](#)), Barnabas and Paul are called apostles ([14:14](#)). Paul himself then may have designated Andronicus and Junia as apostles, depending on how the sentence structure of [Romans 16:7](#) is understood. Then there are the cases of the Lord’s brother James ([Galatians 1:19](#)), Silas ([Acts 17:4](#); [1 Thessalonians 2:6](#)), and even Jesus himself ([Hebrews 3:1](#))! Were we to take the time to sort through the issues of the designation *apostle*, we may find the answer “it’s complicated” to be less and less flippant and more and more appealing as we go along!

We don’t have to dig very far, however, before we reach the ironclad conclusion that Paul was an apostle under any definition of that word excepting that he was not of the original 12. His commission and authority to that office came directly from Jesus himself ([Acts 9:1–6, 15](#); [Galatians 1:1](#)).

His approach to the problem

addressed in today’s text is similar. At one level, it’s a complicated issue. Complications fall away and conclusions become ironclad as Paul uses an analogy from everyday life to focus on the main issue that then serves as a touchstone for all “but what about ...” complications.

### B. Lesson Context: Paul, Jews, and Gentiles

The observations in the Lesson Contexts of the previous two lessons still apply, so that information need not be repeated here. But as Paul’s letter to the church in Rome crosses into chapter 9, a new issue occupies his thoughts: the problem of Israel.

Fewer than 1 percent of Christians today come from a background of Judaism. But that was not the case in Paul’s day. Initially, the majority of Christian believers were of that background. The church in Rome had a mix of Jews and Gentiles. There were apparently significant numbers of both, with evidence suggesting that those of Gentile background were in the majority (compare [Romans 1:5, 6, 13](#); [11:13](#); [15:11](#)).

This put Paul in a unique position to address the church in Rome, a congregation he had never visited. His educational background was that of a learned Jewish rabbi. He had earned this distinction from having studied under Gamaliel, one

of the best Jewish teachers of the day (Acts 22:3; compare 5:34). This gave Paul great credibility with any informed Jew.

Yet Paul had devoted much of his efforts to evangelizing Gentiles (Romans 15:15, 16; Galatians 2:8, 9; Ephesians 3:8). He even defended their legitimacy as believers before the gathering of “apostles and elders” known as the Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-4). These actions resulted in Paul’s having great standing among believers of Gentile background.

Both groups in the church in Rome would therefore listen to Paul. And it was important that they did so as he continued to address the issue of relationship between Christians of different backgrounds.

In Romans 9:1, Paul began to work through a heartbreaking reality: great numbers of his own Jewish people had rejected the Jewish Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. Paul’s missionary travels had resulted in not just disinterest, but ferocious rejection (see Acts 14:19; 17:5; 18:6). Why?

Paul turned to Scripture to find the explanation. From Romans 9:1 to 11:10 he quotes from (what we call) the Old Testament 25 times. Given that there are only 64 verses in this section, that’s about one Old Testament quote every two and a half verses! Those texts reveal, among other things, Israel’s long history as a

“disobedient and obstinate people” (Romans 10:21; quoting Isaiah 65:2).

Romans 11:7-10 summarizes 9:1-11:6 by concluding that the proclamation of the gospel has resulted in two camps among the people of Israel: those who accept the gospel are “the elect,” while those who do not are “the others ... hardened.” The significance of all this is the subject of today’s study.

### **C. Lesson Context: Olive Trees**

Today’s lesson text features an analogy involving olive trees. In the Mediterranean world of Paul’s day, olive trees were found all over: from Jerusalem to Antioch to Corinth to Rome. The produce of these trees had several uses. Olives themselves were food. Olive oil had value for cooking and as fuel for lamps. It had ceremonial and medicinal value.

The value of olive trees is attested in Jotham’s parable where—in an obvious ranking of most valuable to least—an olive tree, a fig tree, a vine, and a thornbush are asked in turn to reign over the trees. The olive tree’s answer is, “Should I give up my oil, by which both gods and humans are honored, to hold sway over the trees?” (Judges 9:9). Olive tending was serious and profitable business.

## **I. Result of Stumble**

(ROMANS 11:11-15)

A. Provoking to Jealousy (vv. 11, 12)

**11a. Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery?**

The phrase *Again I ask* introduces implications of [Romans 11:7-10](#) regarding Israel's division (see the [Lesson Context](#), above). In so doing, Paul acknowledges that the widespread unbelief of his fellow Jews is indeed a stumble. But he does not see this trespass as unrecoverable. When we combine the words *stumble* and *fall* with the "spirit of stupor" ascribed to Jewish unbelievers in [Romans 11:8](#), we have a picture something like that of a person sleepwalking. He is oblivious to hazards in such a state. A family member screams a warning of a hazard the sleepwalker does not see. The sleepwalker, not yet fully awake, pays no heed and trips. He is on his way to the ground, with no hope of regaining his balance in time. Right?

**11b. Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.**

*Not at all!* says Paul. Recovery is possible because of two connected results of Jewish unbelief. First, as the Jews have rejected the great salvation message of the gospel, it has impelled Paul to offer this message *to the Gentiles* (see [Acts](#)

[13:46](#); [18:6](#); [28:28](#)). Paul has found many Gentiles gladly receptive of the gospel ([13:48](#)).

Contrasting the use of the word *transgression* here with that word in the first half of the verse is important. The Greek noun behind the second instance of *transgression* is elsewhere translated "trespass(es)" and "sin(s)" and those inform the sense here (examples: [Romans 5:15-17](#)). To be sure, Israel's lack of faith is sinful. But repentance and forgiveness are still possible, as Paul goes on to establish.

Second, the Gentiles' receptivity to the gospel can serve as an incentive for Jews to believe as well. When we see someone receive a benefit, our impulse is to want that benefit too! Jewish unbelievers, seeing Gentile lives radically changed by Christ, will want this change and joy in their own lives (compare [Deuteronomy 32:21](#), quoted in [Romans 10:19](#)).



Visual for Lesson 12. Start a discussion by

pointing to this visual as you ask, "How do we overcome hurdles to Christianity that nationalism may pose?"

#### **What Do You Think?**

What boundaries or limits should we observe regarding techniques used to win people to Christ?

#### **Digging Deeper**

Evaluate the phrase "the end justifies the means" in relation to this question.

**12. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!**

Paul often characterizes the benefits of Christian faith as *riches* (compare [Romans 2:4](#); [Ephesians 1:7](#); [3:8](#)). The gospel's gracious offer of salvation through faith represents the greatest spiritual treasure in the universe! But most Jews are leaving this offer on the table. Their *loss* is accompanied by the "inestimable gift" ([2 Corinthians 9:15](#)) being offered to *the Gentiles*.

Since that's the as-is case, then would it not be better still were Jews to accept the offer as well? Paul's vision is grand here. Imagine if all Gentiles and Jews accept the salvation made possible through Christ! This would include every single person on earth. We gain a glimpse

of what motivated Paul with such extraordinary passion as to suffer as he did for the sake of the gospel.

#### **B. Pushing for Emulation (vv. 13-15)**

**13, 14. I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.**

Paul addresses the Gentiles in his readership with a direct appeal: he intends to do everything in his power to *arouse my own people to envy* for the sole purpose of saving *some of them*. His technique will be to use his *ministry as the apostle to the Gentiles* in any way possible to win as many Gentiles to Christ as possible. By implication, the Gentiles' part is to live in such a way that Jewish unbelievers will want to have what they have.

#### **What Do You Think?**

Under what circumstances, if any, should Paul's ministry to Gentiles be a precedent for sending missionaries to other cultures rather than training evangelists from within those cultures? Why?

#### **Digging Deeper**

How do [Acts 13:46](#); [18:6](#); [Galatians 2:7-9](#); and [Philippians 3:5](#) inform your viewpoint, if at all?

**15. For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?**

By *their rejection* Paul refers to the Jewish refusal to believe in Christ. As he has already shown, the Jewish unbelievers are culpable for this, but it also fits into God's plan for the reconciling of the world, the inclusion of Gentiles into the people of God (see [Romans 5:11](#); [2 Corinthians 5:19](#)). What a great marvel would it be if, as a result, Jews come to faith! It would seem miraculous, like *life from the dead*.

## II. Outcome of Brokenness

([ROMANS 11:16-21](#))

### A. Partaking of Fatness (vv. 16-18)

**16. If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.**

Paul now reasons with two examples tied to Jewish history. First, breadmaking is considered. *The part of the dough* in his illustration is the final dough ball that is ready to be baked. This process begins with grinding grain to make flour. Moses had commanded the people of Israel to take the *firstfruits*, a portion of this flour and make a loaf that was to be offered to the Lord ([Numbers 15:17-21](#); compare

[Nehemiah 10:37](#); [Ezekiel 44:30](#)). Paul considers this act of offering to be making the firstfruit loaf *holy*, and, by extension, this holiness can be applied to the whole batch of flour and its resultant bread loaves.

The second illustration has to do with a tree, its *root* and its *branches*. Branches are dependent upon the health of a tree's root system. If the root dies, so will the branches. Branches detached from the main tree and its root will die (compare [John 15:4-6](#)). Paul has in mind here a family tree, the tree of the nation of Israel. In a sense, Israel is continually blessed and made holy by the covenant God made with its great patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (see [Exodus 2:24](#); [Leviticus 26:42](#)). If the essential root of the tree (the patriarchs) is considered holy, this holiness extends to any branches attached to the tree.

#### ***What Do You Think?***

Considering Christianity's roots in Judaism, how should this text influence our view of the value of the Old Testament?

#### ***Digging Deeper***

Consider also [Romans 15:4](#); [1 Corinthians 10:11](#); [Colossians 2:14](#)

**17, 18. If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in**

**among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you.**

Paul expands this analogy of a holy tree and its branches to imagine some of the branches being *broken off*. This may be from pruning or wind damage, but branches removed from a tree are usually unhealthy or unproductive. Such branches are fit only to be firewood (John 15:6). If an olive farmer cuts off some unproductive branches, it could be for the purpose of grafting on new, healthy branches from a *wild olive* tree. This description fits the Gentiles well, for they have been growing wild, apart from the supervision and care of God given to Israel for hundreds of years.

These new, grafted branches will be productive only if they tap *the nourishing sap from the olive root*. The new branches must receive water and the nourishment of the soil from their new host. They have been given a huge upgrade from their scrubby wild tree origins. They flourish because of the new tree, not the other way around. Paul's word to the Gentile believers is to remember that their inclusion in the church allows them to be recipients of the great blessings the Lord

has lavished on Israel for centuries. They, with faithful Jews, are now fellow heirs of God's promises (Ephesians 3:6). There is no justification for boasting about status (compare John 4:22).

#### **What Do You Think?**

What needs to happen for you to be considered a root for the generation of Christians to come?

#### **Digging Deeper**

How will you create and maintain accountability for your progress?

### **B. Grafting by Faith (vv. 19–21)**

**19, 20. You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble.**

Paul continues to warn his Gentile readers to consider God's purpose in all of this. The word *Granted* indicates that those who make the argument that *branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in* are correct up to point. What they miss is the reason those Jews were broken off: it was *because of unbelief*. This is not a cause for being *arrogant* (proud), as if the Jews have been humiliated by God so Gentiles can feel superior. Instead, this is a cause to *tremble*, realizing how dire their situation was and how gracious



God has been to them.

### **GRAFTING TODAY**

In 2001, I moved to Fallbrook, California, the self-proclaimed “Avocado Capitol of the World.” Avocado groves cover the hillsides surrounding the quaint village. However, as the population has grown, many of the groves have been subdivided for housing. The good news for avocado lovers is that the developers left an avocado tree or two on many of the building lots. I was pleased to buy one such. But I was disappointed with both the quantity and quality of the fruit.

Research revealed the tree was not the Hass variety, the fruit of which most consumers prefer. So I hired a specialist to graft six Hass shoots onto my tree. The grafts thrived, and I had an abundance of excellent avocados the next season.

This experience caused me to reflect anew on how people come to Christ and his church. Gentiles turned to Christ in such great numbers that within a few decades—and to the very present day—Christians of non-Jewish background far outnumber Christians of Jewish background. What does this suggest about whom God might choose to graft into the church today?

—C. R. B.

### **21. For if God did not spare the**

**natural branches, he will not spare you either.**

Arrogance that displeases God can result in more pruning! What has been grafted in (the Gentiles) can just as easily be removed.

### **III. Possibility of Restoration**

**(ROMANS 11:22-24)**

#### **A. Continuing in Goodness (vv. 22, 23)**

**22. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.**

Paul reflects that this situation reveals a paradox: God is good and severe at the same time. While the analogy of the olive tree is still in view here, this is more akin to presenting God as a parent. Parents know there is a time to show great love and kindness to a child, but also a time when discipline is necessary. Severe discipline does not negate the love of a good parent. To receive the kindness, the child must be obedient. Continuing in God’s goodness is a matter of continuing in the faith. As with the unbelieving Jews, unfaithfulness risks being cut off for the ingrafted Gentiles.

### **REBELLION AND RESTORATION**

I work with a ministry that provides a setting in which at-risk, rebellious youth may be rescued from damaging lifestyles. The vast majority of these young people have struggled with alcohol and drugs. Nearly half have been abused. Almost all are unable to graduate from high school with their age cohort.

These youth encounter Christ in this ministry through biblical teaching, counseling, mentoring, physical work, and schooling adapted to individual needs. Distractions such as cell phones and social media are removed—action considered “severe” by some students. The youth see God’s goodness in the unconditional Christian love they receive and in the life-structure this love provides. Eventually, the majority come to see God beginning to work in their lives.

Regardless of age, most of us tend to resist God’s discipline, thinking it to be too severe. But there’s a big difference between restorative discipline that is temporary and retributive punishment, which is eternal. Will you accept the former so you can avoid the latter?

—C. R. B.

#### **What Do You Think?**

What steps can you take to help your fellow believers better understand both God’s kindness and severity?

#### **Digging Deeper**

What will happen in cases where one is stressed to the exclusion of the other.

**23. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.**

Unbelieving Jews have been cut off, a display of God’s harshness. But they can be grafted back in, included anew, if they change unbelief to belief. God’s kindness is ready and waiting for them. There is still time and hope.

#### **B. Regrafting onto God’s Tree (v. 24)**

**24. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!**

For Paul, there is an unnatural sense to bringing the Gentile believers into the people of God, perhaps like mixing metric and standard tools. It works, but doesn’t always seem to fit right. The churches of Paul’s day struggle with things like food forbidden to Jews being served at church functions ([Galatians 2:11, 12](#)). Basic understandings of things such as one God, personal holiness, and respect for Scripture are assumed by Jews but are foreign to Gentiles. Their

Jews but are foreign to Gentiles. Their religion and behavior is *wild by nature* in contrast.

Paul's vision is not just Gentile inclusion, but a return of fellow Jews. The tree would then thrive as never before. What a magnificent tree it would be! What a glorious church we would see!

## Conclusion

### A. Grace Is Always Prior to Salvation

Romans is consistent in always presenting faith, not works, as the way to be justified in God's reckoning. Paul insists this is nothing new. In the history of Israel, the Jewish remnant is saved, as always, by grace not works ([Romans 11:5, 6](#)). Grace is always prior to salvation, and salvation cannot be earned. Salvation begins with God's response of grace to our situation and our response of faith in return.

Paul maintains a certain pecking order in all of this: God's salvation through faith comes first to the Jews, then to the Gentiles ([Romans 1:16](#)). The punishment of God for unbelief also comes first to Jews, then to Gentiles ([2:9](#)). This is validated by history, by God's choice of Israel to be his holy nation and vehicle for bringing salvation to the world. Jews first, then Gentiles—both in terms of privilege as well as accountabil-

ity.

But as true as that is, isn't it just hypothetical today? Here in the year 2019, the details of relations between Jews and Gentiles in the church have faded. But foundational lessons still stand. One is that it's easy to become prideful, to focus on self rather than God and his plan. As Paul opposed that, so must we.

### B. Prayer

Father, help us stay grafted in! May our faith replace pride as we trust in you for all things. We pray in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

God is still able.

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible](#)  
Student

## Into the Lesson

Distribute to each student a sheet of paper and a pen. Hold up a can or jar of olives and say, “Olive trees are some of the oldest known plants. Here’s a fun fact: An olive is actually a fruit, not a vegetable! In one minute, see how many foods you can list that might have olives in them. Ready, set, go!” (*Responses may include pizza, Greek salad, hummus, pasta salad, stuffed olives, baked cheese olives, and green olive dip.*) Ask volunteers to share their lists.

Say, “Hold up your hand for one of three choices: Do you prefer green olives, black olives, or no olives? [Allow responses.] No matter which category you fall into, none of us is superior because of it. The apostle Paul used an analogy involving olive trees to point out something important about our faith. Let’s see what it is.”

*Alternative.* If there is an expert gardener in your congregation who can give a short talk on grafting (or a person who is willing to research it and share the information), ask him or her to share the knowledge with the class. Then say, “Paul

uses the analogy of grafting a new branch into an older tree to point out something important about our faith. Let’s see what it is.”

## Into the Word

Have volunteers take turns reading aloud three or four verses from [Romans 11:11-24](#).

Divide the class into three groups, and distribute to each group a sheet of paper and a pen. Tell each group to choose a well-known tune and rewrite the lyrics incorporating the words *God*, *graft*, and *branches*. Encourage full use of today’s lesson text.

If students need help getting started, suggest tunes from hymns such as “Amazing Grace” or “Blessed Assurance” or from contemporary worship music such as “What a Beautiful Name” or “Good Good Father.” Or the groups could use tunes such as “Home on the Range” or “This Land Is Your Land.” For a fun challenge, suggest that groups rhyme their lyric lines.

Allow about 10 minutes for groups to compose their songs. Have group representatives take turns reading or singing their groups’ creations. Discuss as appropriate.

*Option.* Distribute copies of the “Spiritual Heritage” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download.

Allow students about five minutes to work in pairs to complete and discuss. Encourage learners to share ways their spiritual walk has been strengthened by godly people. Use this as a transition to the Into Life segment.

that we are like olive trees, rooted and grounded in a relationship with you. In Jesus' victorious name we pray. Amen."

## Into Life

Say, "Some of us may bristle when newcomers to church offer a different approach to a solution, one that brushes against 'this is the way we've always done things' approach." Initiate a discussion on how a sense of "better than" can drift into the church. Ask, "In what ways might Christians today boast about spiritual status?" After each response ask, "What Bible verses can help us gain a proper view of our grafting into God's eternal family in this regard?" Jot answers on the board.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the "Spiritual Superiority" activity from the reproducible page. Have students complete the checklist individually, then discuss the questions together.

Conclude your time together with this prayer: "Thank you, God, that you do not love us more or love us less because of our backgrounds or how long we've walked with you. We confess any prideful thoughts or actions we have toward others in the church [*pause for a moment of silent reflection*]. We are truly grateful