

August 21
Lesson 12

GRAFTED IN

DEVOTIONAL READING: John 15:1-8

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Romans 11:11-36

ROMANS 11:11-24

¹¹ 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. 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!

¹³ I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry ¹⁴ in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? 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.

¹⁷ 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, ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." ²⁰ Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

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

KEY VERSE

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. —Romans 11:22

LESSON AIMS

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

1. Identify the wild and natural branches in Paul's metaphor.
2. Explain the significance of faith in whether one is grafted into the tree or cut off.
3. Tell one way that he or she will continue in the Lord's goodness.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Grafting Branches
- B. Lesson Background

I. Holy Root, Holy Branches (ROMANS 11:11-16)

- A. Jews and Jealousy (vv. 11, 12)
- B. Rejection and Reconciliation (vv. 13-16)

II. Wild Branches, Cultivated Tree (ROMANS 11:17-24)

- A. Breaking and Boasting (vv. 17-21)
Honoring God's Treasure
- B. Goodness and Grafting (vv. 22-24)
Family Plans, Individual Billing

Conclusion

- A. Where to Focus
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Grafting Branches

Humans have been experimenting with ways to improve cultivated food production for thousands of years. Ancient farmers discovered that trees had the potential of providing many nutritious fruits and nuts, but multiplying trees through seeds was a slow and unpredictable process. Those farmers discovered that better results could be obtained by taking cuttings from a healthy tree and allowing these cuttings to

produce roots. These miniature trees could then be planted in soil and would grow quickly.

Around 1000 BC, farmers learned another way to use these cuttings. They discovered that a branch from one tree could be inserted into a cut on another tree, and this foreign branch would become part of the new tree. This allowed for the use of a mature root and trunk system in production of fruit different from the “host” tree.

We can only imagine the wonder this must have produced among ancient farmers, to have a tree with red apples on some branches and golden apples on others! This method, known as *grafting*, is an important part of orchard science today. Grafting is now done with fruit trees, with ornamental flowers such as roses, and with plants such as tomatoes. The process is similar in all cases: a healthy branch is joined to another plant, and the result is production that the host plant was incapable of previously.

Our lesson today relies on the awareness of grafting as a common practice among those who cultivated orchards. One of the most important and valued trees of Paul’s world was the olive tree. The readers of the book of Romans were familiar with orchards of olive trees in the countryside as well as the remarkable and valuable practice of grafting. Paul used these common sights and experiences to illustrate an important truth.

B. Lesson Background

In [Romans 9](#), the apostle Paul began to discuss a situation that distressed him greatly: the unbelief of his fellow Jews. In last week’s lesson we saw him recap the scriptural history of Israel to demonstrate that God controlled the nation’s future. While we may not understand why God chooses certain nations and people as his instruments ([Isaiah 7:18-20](#); etc.), Paul warned against considering God to be unjust in those decisions ([Romans 9:14](#)).

In the text just preceding that of today’s lesson, Paul asked and answered two questions concerning Israel. First, “Did God reject his people?” No, Paul said, that cannot possibly be true ([Romans 11:1](#)). He supported his conclusion with a theme common in the Old Testament prophets: that God had preserved a “remnant” of faithful Israelites ([Romans 11:5](#); compare [Isaiah 10:21](#)). Paul considered himself to be part of that remnant.

Second, why didn’t more Jews believe in Jesus, as Paul did? His answer was that God had “hardened” many of the people of Israel in a way that precluded belief ([Romans 11:7, 8](#)). The apostle pointed out that this was nothing new for the people of Israel, and he quoted Scriptures to show this historical pattern of unbelief (a mixing of [Deuteronomy 29:4](#); [Psalm 69:22, 23](#); and [Isaiah 29:10](#)). All this led up to a further question, the one that begins today’s lesson.

I. Holy Root, Holy Branches

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

A. Jews and Jealousy (vv. 11, 12)

11a. Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all!

Paul uses a metaphor all will recognize: stumbling while walking. We have all done this—tripped on something like an uneven sidewalk and staggered for a few steps. Sometimes we regain our balance; sometimes we go down. Paul pictures those of unrepentant Israel (*they*) as if in the middle of the stumble. They have been tripped up by their unbelief and rejection of Jesus. Will their stumbling result in a complete fall? Paul uses strong language to answer: *Not at all!*

HOW TO SAY IT

Abraham *Ay-bruh-ham.*

Barnabas *Bar-nuh-bus.*

Gentiles *Jen-tiles.*

Isaac *Eye-zuk.*

Nehemiah *Nee-huh-my-uh.*

patriarchs *pay-tree-arks.*

What Do You Think?

What is most likely to make you stumble in your faith walk? How do you resist or recover when it happens?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding temptations of behavior

Regarding temptations of the tongue

Regarding temptations of thought

11b. Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.

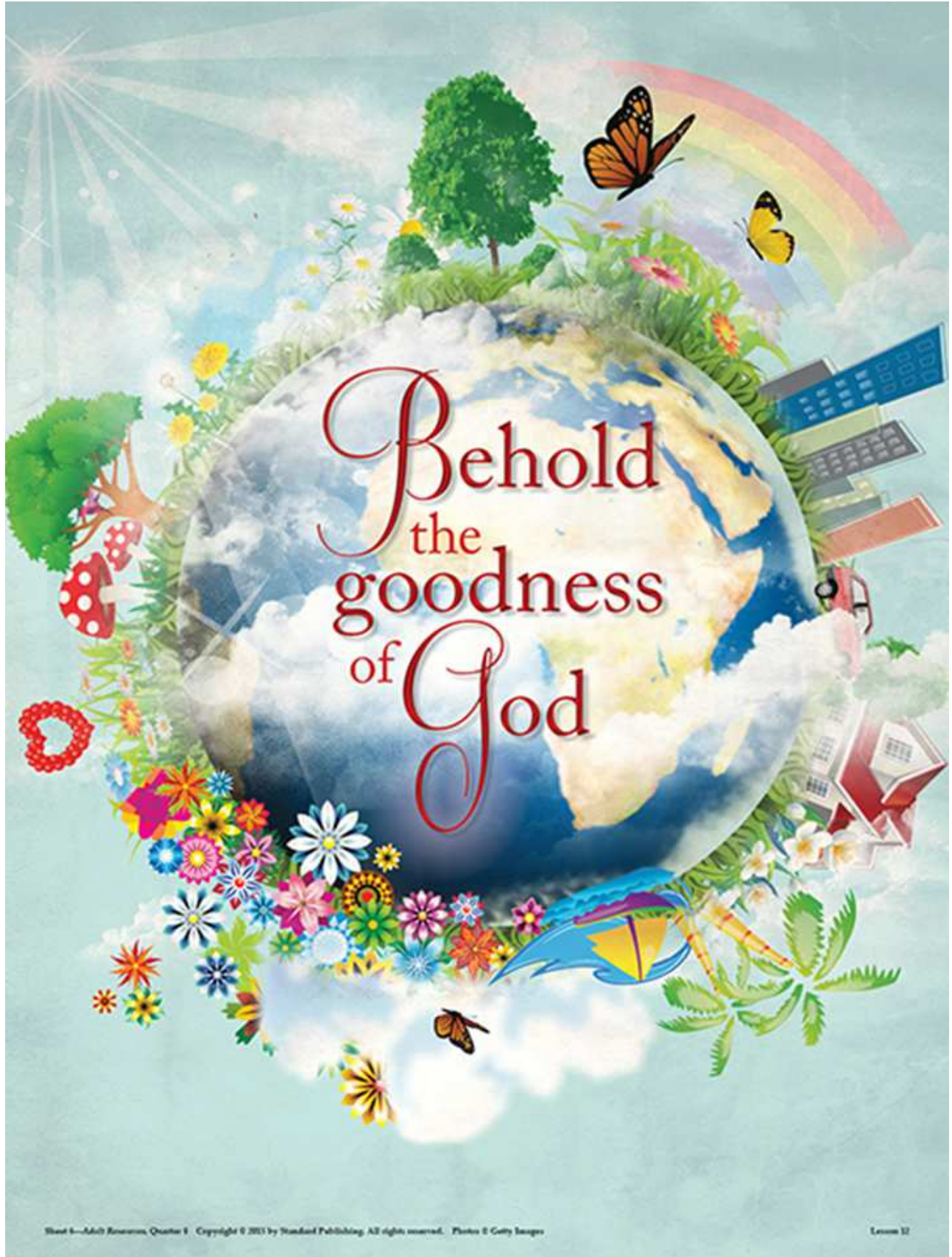
Paul speaks as one who earnestly desires his fellow Jews to come to faith in Jesus. In this regard, he sees a useful purpose in *their transgression*. (Note: the Greek noun behind the word *transgression* in this half-verse and in [verse 12](#) is elsewhere rendered “sin[s]” or “trespass[es]”; see [Matthew 6:14, 15](#); [Romans 4:25](#); [5:15-20](#); etc.) The longsimmering hostility toward Gentiles on the part of Jews is due to the latter’s self-image as being favored as God’s covenant people. As despised Gentiles now flock into the church and accept the Jewish Messiah as theirs, the result will be that Jews are made *envious*.

The apostle predicts that this envy will eventually serve as a wake-up call for his fellow Jews, causing them to reevaluate their unbelief (compare [Romans 10:19](#), quoting [Deuteronomy 32:21](#)). That unbelief is therefore a temporary rather than a final and ultimate rejection of Jesus.

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 moves to an *if/then* argument using parallel phrases. *If [the Jews’] transgression* (which = *[if] their loss*) is resulting in *riches for the world* (which = *riches for the Gentiles*), then *how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!*

In other words, Jewish unbelief has been the Gentiles’ gain. Given that the parallel if-phrases describe reality, Paul is marveling at how much greater still the benefits would be if all Jews were to join Gentiles in faith. Just think of how much greater the riches of God would be for the entire world if all Israel decided to include itself in the family of faith in Jesus!



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Lesson 12

Visual for Lesson 12. *As you discuss [verse 22](#), use this visual to challenge learners to list ways God has been good to them.*

Paul knows that the spiritual blessings of God are not limited. There is an abundance of grace available, plenty for all believers. How blessed the entire world would be if Gentiles and Jews—everyone—named Jesus as Lord!

B. Rejection and Reconciliation ([vv. 13-16](#))

13. I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry

Paul leaves no doubt regarding the identity of his audience at this point. Although the church in Rome consists of both Jewish and Gentile believers, he is speaking specifically now *to you Gentiles*. He claims special authority to do this, because he is *the apostle to the Gentiles*—a status that the Roman church knows about even though Paul has not yet visited Rome (see [Acts 13:46](#); [18:6](#); [Galatians 2:8](#)). No one else is described this way, and Paul is using his unique status as a megaphone.

14. in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.

Paul lays bare his plan: he will do anything to gain the attention and therefore the faith of his fellow Jews. We can see how awkward and strange Paul's ministry must appear to them: a learned rabbi ([Acts 22:3](#)) who associates with "unclean" Gentiles and accepts them as beloved brothers and sisters in faith. Even so, that does not mean he has ever stopped loving those of his *own people*—his Jewish kinfolk. If his ministry to Gentiles results in Jewish *envy* and brings some to faith, that is good. Paul wants as many Jews as possible to be saved.

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

Paul now pictures the desired outcome as he uses three more *if/then* statements across this verse and the next. First, if Jewish unbelief (*rejection*) has allowed the reconciling message of the gospel to be extended to the Gentile world, then the reception of the gospel by the Jews will be like a resurrection *from the dead*. That would be a miraculous work of God every bit as marvelous as the inclusion of the Gentiles into his people.

16a. If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy;

Second, if in the process of making bread the part that is offered as *firstfruits is holy*, then the *whole batch* of dough *is holy*. This is a reference to the Jewish practice of giving a part of the grain harvest to the priests, a firstfruits offering (see [Numbers 15:18-21](#)). This firstfruits offering was given as an act of worship to the Lord, thus making it holy. Paul reasons that if a large batch of dough is created, enough for a dozen loaves, and a couple of the loaves become an offering, then all the loaves are sanctified because of their common source.

16b. if the root is holy, so are the branches.

Paul's logic is similar in the third *if/then* statement. If the foundational part of a tree (its root system) is *holy*, then it makes sense that *the branches* thereby produced are also holy. The apostle is expressing his hope that believing Israel (including himself) will have a positive, sanctifying effect on larger, unbelieving

Israel. The example of believing Jews such as Paul, Barnabas, and Peter is to be a catalyst to bring Paul's beloved nation to faith in Christ.

This reminds us of last week's lesson concerning the history of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The promises and blessings they received still rest on Israel. We note, however, that the concept of *holy* as Paul uses it here does not mean "set apart for salvation," but means "set apart" in a general way for passing along the promises of God.

What Do You Think?

How can we let God's holiness be evident in our lives without projecting a sanctimonious "holier than thou" aura in the process?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

At work or school

At home

In the church

In public (at the mall, restaurants, etc.)

Other

II. Wild Branches, Cultivated Tree

(ROMANS 11:17-24)

A. Breaking and Boasting (vv. 17-21)

17. 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,

Remember that Paul is addressing Gentiles in this section. In that light, he takes his final analogy a little further, narrowing the focus from a generic tree to an olive tree. Olive groves abound in the land of Israel, in Greece (where Paul is while writing this letter), and in the Roman countryside. Olives themselves serve as food, but more importantly they yield olive oil, a mainstay of Roman households. Paul knows how to paint a word picture that will connect instantly with his readers.

Imagine a cultivated olive tree. As the one who tends the orchard prunes off certain branches, he also grafts in branches he has cut from a *wild olive* tree. When these wild branches engage with the established tree, they begin to flourish. They receive nourishment from the tree's root system and produce olives. In this parable-like analogy, the tender of the tree is God. He has removed *some of the branches* of the cultivated olive tree, a reference to unbelieving Israel. In their place, he has grafted in foreign branches, a reference to the Gentiles. These Gentiles now benefit from the heritage of the Jewish nation as they too become people of faith like Abraham or Paul himself (compare [Ephesians 2:11-22](#)). This sets the stage for a warning.

18. 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.

Gentiles must not see themselves *to be superior* because they have placed faith in Christ while many Jews have not. The Gentile readers are to remember that their faith is dependent on the faith heritage of the Jews (*the root*). The root is not dependent on the branches. Without the root, the branches would not exist.

This is a warning to be heeded yet today. Our faith is dependent on the examples and promises of the Old Testament and the biblical nation of ancient Israel (compare [1 Corinthians 10:1-13](#)). Paul sees faith in Christ without Jewish roots to be an impossibility. We neglect the heritage of Old Testament Scripture at our peril! “Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope” ([Romans 15:4](#)).

What Do You Think?

How do you use the Old Testament?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In private devotional times

In Scriptures you memorize

In discussions with fellow Christians

Other

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’s warning to Gentile believers continues. It is simplistic to think that the Jewish *branches* have been *broken off* from the tree merely so that Gentile branches can take their place by the grafting process. Everything revolves around faith and lack of faith (*unbelief*). When this is realized, the result should be humility (*not ... arrogant*) and reverential awe (*tremble*; compare [Philippians 2:12](#)).

What Do You Think?

How do you guard yourself against faith-damaging arrogance?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding assessments of your spiritual maturity as compared with others

Regarding denominational elitism

Regarding level of education

Other

HONORING GOD’S TREASURE

I remember that, as a child, I sometimes heard people speaking ill of other nations that our country had been at war with in the past. These people seemed still at war. I wondered how their biases could coexist with our Sunday school song: “Red and yellow, black and white—they are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world.”

Annette, a new friend of mine, lived in the northwestern U.S. until her family moved to Iowa. Her attitude toward her new church family is *every person here is someone I can learn from*. Although she is busy finishing a college degree while raising several children, she acts on her belief by inviting people to coffee and meals. She honors the God-treasure she finds in each person she meets.

Our current church family has members from other regions of our country and other nations, so comparisons are inevitable. It seems just human nature to think of one’s own way of life as “correct.” But if

we resist the urge to rank one way of doing things above others and, like Annette, have a heart to seek the God-treasure in people from other backgrounds, then we create a welcoming community. Let us marvel at what God is doing in each person so that we remain free to love them, their families, and their nations.—V. E.

21. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

Using another *if/then* statement, Paul expresses the ultimate guard against Gentile pride over Jews: God has proven his willingness to break off branches that do not expect it. The ancient Jews (*the natural branches*), because of their status as the covenant people of God, never expected to be cut off from their promised land—but it happened when God sent them into captivity in 586 BC. Arrogance and faith are not easy companions. Even as we remember God’s mercy, we should fear his wrath no matter our background.

B. Goodness and Grafting (vv. 22-24)

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 now uses the olive-tree analogy to reveal some profound things about God’s nature. A tree tender might be seen as a kind giver of life when grafting and a severe judge when pruning (see [Matthew 3:10](#); [Luke 13:6-9](#)). God displays both *kindness and sternness*. He rewards those who are humble and faithful ([Genesis 15:1](#); [Proverbs 22:4](#)) and punishes the arrogant and unfaithful ([Nehemiah 1:8](#); [Proverbs 16:5](#)). He is kind and gentle, yet consistently intolerant of those who misuse his mercy. If we preach the goodness of God but neglect to mention his severity, we give an incomplete picture of him.

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

The Gentile readers are further warned to temper any arrogance. They should remember that God, the great grafter, is perfectly capable of grafting the broken-off branches back into the olive tree. This will happen if Jewish unbelievers *do not persist in unbelief*.

This is an important counterbalance to the verses that speak of God’s hardening people against faith. Our faith is not wholly dependent on the actions of God. We play a part too. To continue in unbelief is a personal choice; so is yielding to God in faith. Just as the Gentiles in the church in Rome had chosen to become believers, so too may the many unbelieving Jews of their city.

FAMILY PLANS, INDIVIDUAL BILLING

Even as we grow weary of advertising blitzes, it’s hard not to be amused at various marketing attempts. At the time of this writing, a well-known company is offering lower per-line rates for cellular service for customers having 7 to 10 in their group. Of course, not all families are that large. But by billing lines separately (thus eliminating the need for a shared budget), the plan invites potential customers to recruit neighbors, coworkers, and acquaintances in order create a “family” and reap greater savings. The commercials illustrate the possibilities by depicting people who don’t seem to have much in common.

Sometimes churches may feel like that. On the one hand is the “group aspect” of people from diverse backgrounds having a common allegiance to Jesus Christ. On the other hand is the “individual aspect,” where each is accountable for his or her own faith in trusting that Jesus has paid the bill for sin. More people joining the kingdom of God is better for everyone, since he gifts each of us in ways that we can be a

blessing to others. Today’s lesson text reminds us that God’s invitation to join is open to all. We dare not take upon ourselves the authority to determine whom God can and cannot include.—V. E.

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!

Paul sums up his thoughts with a straightforward analysis that reveals his hope for his people. From a historical Jewish perspective, the inclusion of Gentiles into the people of God without requiring them to become Jews first is outrageous (compare [Acts 15:1](#)). The Jews see themselves as privileged heirs of the covenant of their ancestor Abraham. Their men bear the sign of this covenant: circumcision. Their faith has become systematized and ritualized through their food laws. Gentiles are not just outside the covenant, they are a filth that causes Jews to be “unclean” ([Acts 10:28](#)).

Yet the God of Israel, in his great wisdom and mercy, has included Gentiles in the new covenant people of God. Their inclusion is based on their faith. Paul’s point is that since God is so surprisingly gracious toward these Gentiles, why would we not expect him to be patient and gracious toward unbelieving Jews who reverse course and come to faith in Jesus? Even the broken branches of Israel can be grafted back into the tree and its rich root if they believe in him.

What Do You Think?

How can we do a better job of welcoming “grafted branches” into our churches?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding adjustments to our attitudes

Regarding adjustments to our actions

Conclusion

A. Where to Focus

A controversial topic in some churches concerns the position of Jewish people today in relation to the will of God. For some Christians, this question centers on the modern state of Israel, established in 1948 in historic territory in Palestine. Some Christians teach that this nation’s existence is an expression of God’s will, a sign that he has not forgotten Israel. Others wonder about the Jews in their own cities, questioning whether faithful keeping of Torah and the old covenant is still a valid way to serve God and find his favor. Various interpretations of [Romans 11:26](#) (“all Israel will be saved”) stoke the flames of controversy.

We must not allow the importance of that topic—and it is indeed important—to overshadow what Paul is saying to his readers about the basis of their faith and their attitude toward it. That basis is faith in Jesus, and the proper attitude is fear in the sense of reverential awe.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we pray for Jewish people of today who believe in you but have rejected your Son. May their hearts be softened to hear the truth about Jesus, who wants to be their Savior, as we take the gospel to them. May we speak that gospel humbly. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God can graft in—and prune away—anyone.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Into the Lesson

Conduct an interview with someone in your class or congregation who is skilled in horticulture. Give the interviewee a list of the following interview questions in advance: 1. How would you use a cutting to grow a new plant? 2. What is the purpose of pruning? 3. What is grafting? 4. Under what circumstances would you perform a grafting?

After thanking your interviewee, say, “In today’s lesson, the apostle Paul uses the ancient technique of grafting to illustrate an important truth.”

Alternative. Bring to class a large seed (such as a peach pit), a cutting from a plant in water, two small branches, and a jar of olives. Use these as visual aids as you give a mini-lecture on the lesson’s “Grafting Branches” introduction.

Into the Word

Divide the class in half, designating one half as the *Gentile Wild Branch Group* and the other half as the *Jewish Olive Tree Group*. Distribute handouts of the questions below for in-group discussions. (*Option 1:* Leave off the italicized verse references to compel closer examination of the text at the cost of requiring more time. *Option 2:* If your class is larger, divide the halves into smaller subgroups and give the subgroups fewer questions.)

Gentile Wild Branch Group. 1-How did the fact that Jews stumbled over believing in Jesus benefit Gentiles? (*vv. 11, 12*) 2-What special connection did Paul have with Gentiles? (*v. 13*) 3-How were Gentiles benefitting from the holiness and “nourishing sap” of the olive tree? (*vv. 16, 17*) 4-Why did Paul tell Gentiles “do not consider yourself to be superior” and “do not be arrogant”? (*vv. 18-20*) 5-What is the basis of Gentiles’ standing with God? (*v. 20*) 6-In discussing God’s goodness, what warning did Paul give Gentiles? (*vv. 21, 22*)

Jewish Olive Tree Group. 1-Why was Paul trying to make the Jews jealous? (*vv. 11, 14*) 2-What special connection did Paul have with Jews? (*v. 14*) 3-Why did Paul refer to the root of the olive tree as “holy”? (*v. 16*) 4-Why were some of the branches of the olive tree broken off? (*vv. 19, 20*) 5-What hope did Paul hold out for the olive branches that had been broken off because of unbelief? (*vv. 15, 23*) 6-Why was it more natural for formerly unbelieving Jews to receive God’s grace than it was for the Gentiles? (*v. 24*)

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Behind the Headlines” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated. (This exercise will be more time consuming than it appears at first glance.)

After calling time under either alternative, have groups or pairs present their findings in whole-class discussion. Use the commentary to correct misconceptions.

Into Life

Write on the board *Attitudes / Actions / Speech* as the headers of three columns. Then write *To Do or Have / To Avoid* as the designations of two rows that extend across the three columns. Conduct a whole-class brainstorming session by challenging learners to suggest ways to continue in the Lord's goodness—to not be broken off of the tree into which they have been grafted. The column headings and row labels should prompt learner responses; jot responses on the board at the appropriate intersections of columns and rows. Request learners be specific. (For example, follow the general response “to have a good attitude” with the question “About what, specifically?”) Use [Luke 13:1-8](#) and/or [John 15:1-8](#) to establish further the importance of the discussion.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Part of the Same Tree” activity from the reproducible page. Have learners complete it individually before discussing conclusions in small groups. Instruct that not all boxes need to have entries.