

Romans: Verse-by-Verse

Romans 11:22-27

Study Notes

Paul has been warning the Gentiles not to become proud or to look down on the Jews. He's reminded them that without the failures of the Jews, there wouldn't have been an entrance into God's kingdom for the Gentiles.

In verse 22, he expands on this warning:

“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.”

The word “consider” in the Greek is much stronger than our English word. Our word suggests we should think about something. The Greek word for “consider” means to pay careful attention to something. So, Paul is telling his Gentile friends, “Pay attention to what I am about to tell you.”

He says, “Consider the kindness and the sternness of God.” That’s fascinating, isn’t it? We would most naturally want to choose one or the other, wouldn’t we?

- **Consider God’s Kindness and Sternness:**

The kindness and sternness of God are both part of God's innate character. In context, Paul is pointing to the fact that God was stern with the unbelieving Jews and kind to the unsaved Gentiles.

Because of God's kindness and grace, believing Gentiles were brought into the kingdom. “Sheer grace” allowed the Gentiles to be grafted into the vine.

- **The Sternness Warning:** v. 22 - "Otherwise you will be cut off."

One commentator's view: "Not that those who truly belong to him will ever be rejected, but that continuance or perseverance is the hallmark of God's authentic children."

The problem: If 'cut off' in the Old Testament meant excised from the Jewish community, what does it mean when Paul uses it here in Romans 11?

A historical note: Paul's warning was badly needed in the first century – especially in Rome. Although Judaism was tolerated and even protected by Roman law, the Jews faced opposition and even persecution at the hands of non-Jews throughout Rome and the empire.

Paul was determined that Gentile Christians living in Rome would not share in anti-Semitic prejudice.

Why The Jews Can Be Restored: v. 23

"And if they (meaning the Jews) do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

The key word in the opening of that statement is "persist". It's the same verb as is translated as "continue" in the previous verse.

Paul originally spoke of how the Gentiles – the "wild olive branch" being grafted into the Jewish vine. Now he talks about the Jews being grafted in. It's a twist in metaphors, isn't it?

John Stott's paraphrase of verse 24:

"After all, if you Gentile believers 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 Jewish believers, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!"

God's restoration of Israel is not as difficult as the Gentile arrogance might suggest:

1. Since the natural branches were broken off, the wild ones can be too. 2. Since the wild branches were grafted in, the natural ones could be grafted back in as well.

Let's read verses 25-27:

"I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:

"The deliverer will come from Zion;
he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.

And this is my covenant with them
when I take away their sins."

- **Israel Has Been Hardened:** The promise of restoration

Paul has already warned his Gentile brothers about being arrogant towards the Jews. Now he warns them to not be conceited. He says, "I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited..."

The Greek sentences tie together both ignorance and conceit. It literally reads, "Not ignorant so that not conceited". As one scholar put it,

Paul's use of the word "mystery": It's one of his favorite words in his letters. See: Ephesians 1:9; Ephesians 3:6; Ephesians 5:32; Colossians 1:26; Colossians 2:2; Colossians 4:3; 1Timothy 3:16

Paul "borrowed" the word "mystery" from the religious cults of his day. Originally a "mystery" was a secret that was only known to a cult's

initiate. Paul used it to describe something that was hidden in the past but has now been made apparent.

What is this mystery Paul refers to? It's Christ and the Gospel. In the context of Romans 11, this "mystery" is the good news that in Christ Gentiles are now equal beneficiaries with the Jews of the promises of God and equal members of his family.

Three Consecutive Truths Tied To This "Mystery":

1. "Israel has experienced a hardening ..."
2. There is a timeline in God's planning.
3. "And so all Israel will be saved."

What does Paul mean by "All Israel will be saved"?

Three words to consider:

1. "Israel"

John Calvin: "All Israel" is a reference to the Church:

"I extend the word *Israel* to include all the people of God so that, when the Gentiles have come in and the Jews have returned, 'the salvation of the whole Israel of God, which must be drawn from both, will thus be completed....'" – John Calvin

Issues with Calvin's view: Throughout Romans "Israel" has been used to denote ethnic or national Israel, as opposed to the Gentiles.

2. "All": Who is Paul including in this "All Israel"?

Presently, the majority of "genetic Israel" have been hardened. A minority have become the "believing remnant". "All Israel" must refer to all who are going to find Christ as their Messiah.

3. "Saved": Paul draws from Isaiah 59 to expand on his meaning here:

*The deliverer will come from Zion;
he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.
And this is my covenant with them
when I take away their sins'.*

There are three things we should see here:

1. "*The deliverer will come from Zion*". In Isaiah's original prophecy, this is a reference to Christ's first coming.
2. "*He will turn godlessness away from Jacob*". Isaiah pictures the Messiah's work in moral terms. What has been the fundamental issue with Judah? It's living apart from God's influence.
3. "*This is my covenant with them*". With Israel's sins atoned for and removed, God promises a new covenant with them. That covenant includes the forgiveness of sins.

Together, these statements describe the type of salvation Paul is praying for. His part, as he sees it, is to preach the gospel that some might come to Christ. But he knows it will be a minority.

As I close this section, I want to come back to something I mentioned earlier.

After the German Holocaust, some scholars began insisting that Christian Missions was unwarranted when it came to the Jewish people. Many were embarrassed by attempts to evangelize Jewish people.

In Israel, for many decades the Jewish government demanded an end to Christian missionary activity, claiming it was anti-Semitic.

This led some theologians to develop a new basis for leaving Jews alone in their Judaism. These theologians insisted that God's covenant with Abraham was an 'everlasting covenant'.

In their view, the Old Covenant is still in force, and that therefore God saves Jewish people through their own covenant, without any necessity for them to believe in Jesus.

This view has become known as the “two-covenant theology”. One of its strongest proponents was Bishop Krister Stendahl.

In the “Two covenant” view, there are two different “salvation tracks”. One is the Christian track for the believing Jewish remnant and believing Gentiles. The other track is for historical Israel which relies on God’s covenant with them.

There are many reasons to object to this “two covenant” theory:

- How can there be two paths to salvation?
- Did Jesus die for the Gentiles, but not the Jews?
- Did Jesus give any indication of a “two covenant” salvation?
- How does it mesh with everything Paul has said about the failure of the Old Covenant to change the hearts and minds of Israel?