

Romans 11:22–25

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again. For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

The Thou Is Corporate, Not Individual

The passage addresses a thou and thee throughout — and that thou is the Gentile profession as such, not any individual Gentile. Once that is seen, the whole meaning changes. If it were individual, Hebrews 6 would have to be brought in — for it is impossible to renew to repentance those who have been once enlightened. But the nation of Israel can be restored, and the Gentile graft as a body can be cut out, without touching the question of individual eternal security. God's dispensational ways with Jew and Gentile are in view — not the standing of individual souls before Him.

Goodness and Severity — Both for God's Glory

Verse 22 sets before us two aspects of God that are both equally His: goodness and severity. There is a natural prejudice in guilty hearts against the thought of divine severity as though it were unworthy of a loving God. But severity is as much a reflection of what God is — God is light — as goodness is. It is a reflex of His intolerance of sin, of His holiness, of His righteousness. And the severity that fell on the natural branches when they were broken out is the same severity that will fall on the Gentile profession when it too is cut off. God has no reason to treat the Gentile with more leniency than He treated Israel. Both had a place in the tree. Both abused that place.

Continue in His Goodness — Not by Human Resolve

The exhortation to continue in His goodness and the warning of being cut off if not continuing might seem to be addressed to the responsibility of men. And responsibility is real. But when we look to the reason why the fullness of the Gentiles will actually come in, we have to give the credit entirely to God. Faith is the gift of God. Those who abide in His goodness do so because God has worked in them. Those who form the fullness of the Gentiles are those that belong to God and continue in His goodness because God keeps them in it. Jude 21 is the individual's corresponding call: *keep yourselves in the love of God*. There is responsibility — and there is the sovereignty that underlies it.

Wild and Good — Nature and Cultivation

Verse 24 draws a pointed contrast: wild by nature versus a good olive tree. Wildness in Scripture is not a positive. God had never cultivated the Gentile in the wild. The good olive tree is a cultivated thing — Abraham was called out and separated by God, and the tree that grew from that root was under divine care and oversight. The Gentile graft came from a wild tree. And it was grafted in contrary to nature. That phrase is in the text for a reason — it is not an error or

inconsistency. When a horticulturist grafts, his hand comes very close to the branch. He lays hands upon it. So God has drawn near to man, laid hands upon the wild graft, and brought it in contrary to all expectation. This is not a textbook on tree care — it tells us about the heart of God.

The Mystery — Blindness in Part

Verse 25 introduces a mystery — meaning something not revealed in the Old Testament. It is not that the Old Testament was silent about judgment coming on Israel, or that Israel would be saved in the end. Those things were spoken of. The mystery is the particular manner: that Israel should be displaced, that Gentiles should be brought into the place of privilege, and that God would use this in a program leading back to Israel's national restoration. This was not the subject of Old Testament prophecy.

Blindness in part has happened to Israel. In part — because there are natural branches that remain in the olive tree, an election of grace within the nation. But the nation as such has been removed from the place of privilege. And this blindness is not permanent — it is *until* the fullness of the Gentiles. The apostle's declared purpose in telling us this is given plainly: *lest ye should be wise in your own conceits*. Gentile conceit — the notion that the church is the last thing God is doing, that Israel has no distinct national future — is exactly what this verse is written to correct. The antidote for that conceit is knowing this mystery.

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