

Road Trip Devotion – Romans 11:17-21

by Tony Kafka, Growth Ministries Pastor

^{16b} For if the roots of the tree are holy, the branches will be, too. ¹⁷ But some of these branches from Abraham’s tree—some of the people of Israel—have been broken off. And you Gentiles, who were branches from a wild olive tree, have been grafted in. So now you also receive the blessing God has promised Abraham and his children, sharing in the rich nourishment from the root of God’s special olive tree. ¹⁸ But you must not brag about being grafted in to replace the branches that were broken off. You are just a branch, not the root.

¹⁹ “Well,” you may say, “those branches were broken off to make room for me.” ²⁰ Yes, but remember—those branches were broken off because they didn’t believe in Christ, and you are there because you do believe. So don’t think highly of yourself, but fear what could happen. ²¹ For if God did not spare the original branches, he won’t spare you either. (*Romans 11:16b-21; NLT*)

God has been working to redeem the world since the first sin. God promised Abraham that through his seed the whole world would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3). The nation of Israel was established as the cultivated root from which the church would grow. God’s plan had always been that the Jews (descendants of Abraham) and the Gentiles (people of any other heritage) would be together in the church, all saved by grace. So the church in Rome was this kind of church: a church where all believers, no matter their heritage, were together in Christ.

In much of his letter to the Romans, Paul has been talking directly to the religiously “cultivated” Jews. Until the beginning of the church Christ established, they enjoyed the advantages of the covenant God had with Abraham – the status as children of God, the experience of the divine glory, the law, the temple worship and the promises (see Rom. 9:4-5). However, they struggled to have a real relationship with God as they focused on the advantages instead of the relationship.

The good news is that “everyone [all mankind] who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom. 10:13). Jewish people who chose not to call on the name of Jesus Christ were “broken off.” Non-Jewish people who chose to call on the Lord Jesus were “grafted in.” All of this change in God’s “new Israel” (Rom. 9:6-8) brought tension among those in the church in Rome. Some were cultivated religious people and others were wild new converts. The religious people looked down on the others because they didn’t know the first thing about God and his ways. The uncultivated new converts looked down on the Jewish believers because they didn’t know God. How is this barrier to real openhearted fellowship removed? Don’t think highly of yourself. Instead, think highly of God who has mercy on all. So, when I am guilty of looking down on others in the church for any reason, I need to remember that it’s the Lord who made a place for both them and me.