

November 1, 2026

## KINDNESS: ROMANS 11:11-24

### Introductory Activity

**Ask:** What is the hardest part of planning a wedding or a special event?

**Explain:** Besides all of the logistics and planning, one of the hardest parts of planning a big event is creating the invitation list. This is particularly difficult if you are working on a budget *and* using an event center. Consider the young couple planning a wedding at an event space that charges by guests. Pretty quickly, the costs can add up.

Read or have someone read the opening paragraph on page 82 of the Personal Study Guide. (Who should be included on the invitation list? That question often puts event planners in a tough spot. They must determine how many invitations can be sent based on the event's purpose and the budget available. Ultimately, they're forced to wrestle with the difficult decision of who will receive an invitation and who will not. They would never simply declare that everyone is invited. Yet that's exactly what God does. His invitation is open to all.)

**Summarize and Transition:** Today we will be in Romans chapter 11. (If you use the ETB Leader Pack and have the *Poster: Outline of Romans*, you can note the section on Romans 9-11 headed "The Mystery of Israel") Chapter 11 concludes the section of Romans focused on Israel that began in chapter 9. While Paul consistently critiques Israel's response to the gospel, he is clear that God is not done with Israel. Today we are going to see that God invites anyone, including the unbelieving Jew, to join Him in His Kingdom plans.

### 1. REJECTION (ROM. 11:11-16)

Read (or have someone read) Romans 11:11-16.

**Explain:** Paul has spent chapters 9 and 10 talking about Israel and its failure to accept Christ as the Messiah. So, here he asks, "Have they stumbled so as to fall?" "The fact that they stumbled was not in dispute. But one may recover from a stumble. Stumbling *so as to fall*, however, implies a stumble from which a person does not recover." (ETBC, 92) He answers his own question, "Absolutely not!" They tripped, but they can recover. Here Paul presents to us **Israel's Revokable Rejections** (11a). Just because someone has rejected the gospel does not preclude them from finding salvation in Christ. We can be reminded, in the experience of these unbelieving Jews, that no one is too far gone to receive God's forgiveness. Sometimes, as believers, we can assume that the seemingly inextricable tendency of some to sin excludes them from the promise of salvation. We might say, "It will take an act of God to get that person in church." Well, you are correct. Like Paul, a sinner *par excellence* (I Tim. 1:15), God can act to redeem anyone. We also tend to give up on people after sharing the gospel with them multiple times. Let us be persistent, patient, persuasive evangelists of the Gospel of Christ.

#### Notes:

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *New American Commentary: Romans*, Mounce (NAC)
- *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans*, Moo (NICNT)
- *Exalting Jesus in Romans*, Merida (Exalting)
- *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Romans*, Bruce (TNTC)
- *Be Right*, Wiersbe (Be)

**Pray:** Ask your group to picture in their mind someone that others might have given up on or someone with whom they have shared the gospel many times. Give the group a moment or two to pray for that person and then vocalize a prayer for the group.

**Explain:** Paul is going to continue his discussion of the unbelieving Jew, but he is going to look at it from a positive perspective. In leadership circles, we often hear the phrase, “never let a good crisis go to waste.” In other words, learn from crises or turn them into a positive for the organization. In verses 11b-12, we see God put this principle into practice. This analogy only goes so far because nothing is ever a crisis for God, but He did turn a bad decision by the Jews into something good. Here Paul reveals **Israel’s Redemption-Bringing-Rejection** (11b-12). Israel’s rejection of the gospel brought the redeeming message of the gospel to the Gentiles. We see this most dramatically and literally in two incidents in the book of Acts. First, the stoning of Stephen led to an uptick in the persecution of the Jerusalem church. Acts 8:1 reveals that “all except the apostles were scattered throughout the land of Judea and Samaria.” This scattering led to the ministry of Philip among the Samaritans (8:4ff) and his gospel conversation with the Ethiopian official (8:26ff). This scattering also led to a second incident: the rise of the church at Antioch (11:19ff). This was a multi-ethnic church (13:1) that eventually became the first missionary-sending church. They sent Paul and Barnabas to the Gentile regions of the empire. (13:2-3).

**Brainstorm:** Ask the group to picture in their minds the same lost person as before. Ask them to consider ways the group or the church can reach out to them and others who might otherwise be rejected by some believers.

**Explain:** The work of the early church missionaries reveals to us first their zeal for the gospel and second our often lack of zeal for the gospel message. Paul, though, says that something more than the literal evangelistic efforts resulting from Israel’s rejection would produce a positive result. He says that the salvation of the Gentiles would in turn bring salvation to Israel because the Jews would become jealous of what the Gentiles had in Christ. “This is a positive form of jealousy, not a sinful jealousy...gospel jealousy can provoke an ‘I want in on the riches of Christ!’ mentality.” (Exalting, 187) Wiersbe asks, “If an unsaved [person] visited the average church service, would he be provoked to jealousy and wish he had what we have--or would he just be provoked?” (Be, 128) Moreover, if an unsaved person observed your life, would he or she be provoked to say, “I want some of what they have?”

**Discuss:** As recipients of “every spiritual blessing” in Christ (Eph 1:3), our lives should be marked with *something* that draws others to Christ. Maybe it’s your joy or peace or steadiness in trying times. The Fruit of the Spirit should blossom in our lives and draw others to Christ. Moreover, as Wiersbe points out, something about our churches and small groups

should cause people to say, “I want that.” What are some things we can do, as individual church members, to make our Sunday morning gatherings more inviting and hospitable?

**Explain:** After Peter’s Acts 2 sermon, the people asked: “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:36). After observing Paul and Silas’ worship in the earthquake-ravaged jail, the Philippian jailer asked them, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). When people observe our lives, our worship, and our gathering, they should ask similar questions. Gospel jealousy can be a great evangelistic tool.

Paul has revealed that the rejection of the unbelieving Jew is not permanent, and it had a positive result for both the Gentile and ultimately the Jew as well. Paul builds on the idea that the salvation of the Gentiles will bring the Jews to salvation in verses 13-15. There we see **Paul’s Magnified Ministry** (vv. 13-15). When Jesus first called Paul to the ministry, He explained that his evangelistic efforts would be multi-ethnic and multi-faceted (Acts 9:15). Nevertheless, we primarily think of Paul’s mission work as aimed at Gentiles in Gentile areas. Here he says that his ministry to the Gentiles will be magnified even more if the witness of the Gentiles causes Jews to accept Christ. We can be reminded that **we should multiply our ministry to reach as many as possible**. Maybe the person we struggle to reach can be reached by a different person with whom we share the gospel. Like the unbelieving Jew who turns to Christ, those who accept the gospel today, whether heard from you or another believer, will experience resurrection to “life from the dead” (v. 15)

Paul expresses this hope in verse 16, where he reveals **Believing Israel’s Preparatory Promise** (v. 16). He makes two allusions to the Old Testament. He mentions the “firstfruits” (“dough” ESV, NIV) and “roots.” In both Numbers 15:17-21 (dough) and Leviticus 23:10-11 (sheaf or root), the firstfruits are presented to God as a holy sacrifice. When He accepts those sacrifices, He sanctifies the rest of the harvest. In Paul’s use of the analogy, “the remnant of Israel who believed in Jesus were the firstfruits. They were the hope that one day more from Israel would turn to Christ.” (ETB LG, 102) These believing Jews are a preparatory promise that the heart of a Jew can be changed. **We can know that small gains in one area reveal the possibilities in other areas.**

**Summarize Transition:** Paul and the majority Gentile church at Rome had experienced the hard-heartedness of the Jew. Some might have thought it was next to impossible for many of them to be saved. Paul addressed that sentiment. Their rejection was revokable, and their rejection might just be the thing that brings them to salvation because of the witness of the Gentiles. “We can be assured that the Gospel is for all people”(ETB LG, 103), even those who reject it at first. As a result, we, like Paul, should magnify and multiply our ministry to reach as many as we can, knowing that those we do reach can remind us that more can come to faith in Christ.

## 2. GRAFTED (ROM. 11:17-22)

Read (or have someone read) Romans 11:17-22

**Explain:** With all this talk about Israel's rejection of the gospel, some of the Gentiles might become prideful about their decision to follow Christ. Paul addresses that in the passage. But before we get to his comments, let's make this a little more real for us.

**Discuss:** What are some ways that Christians might express a sinful pride or boastfulness in their relationship with the lost?

**Explain:** Sometimes we can express sinful pride in our salvation when we belittle those who make life choices that stand in contrast to our own. We make jokes about groups of people or talk negatively about people. We should always be ready to stand for holy living, but we should never belittle individuals or mock groups of people. We can also unthinkingly see ourselves as some sort of superior group or class that stands above those who have not yet found salvation in Christ. Lastly, we can become a little too self-assured in our assessment of ourselves. Paul speaks of each of these in this passage in relation to the Jew and Gentile. Let's look at that specific relationship and see how we can apply these principles to our lives.

He begins by reminding the Gentile that they were grafted into God's family tree. Now this is a little bit confusing. Are the Gentiles grafted into Israel, or are the Gentiles grafted into God's plan to redeem mankind, of which Israel had been the principal partner up until this point? It might be splitting theological hairs, but it seems to me that the latter explanation is most accurate, and the former is easier to picture. Either way, the point is this: before the current era, Israel, God's people, had been His missionary, light-bringing partner on earth, and since they have rejected the Light Himself, God has recruited (grafted in) the Gentiles to join as His people to continue His missionary, light-bringing effort.

**1. They were Grafted into Greatness and Should Boast only in that Greatness** (vv. 17-18). First off, let's note that Paul is not giving us a botany lesson. Instead, he is providing an analogy. It would not be normal to graft a wild branch onto a cultivated tree. That is the exact opposite of how things usually work. (See Notes Box for another explanation.) However, that is exactly what God did. He took the unrighteous, the seekers of unrighteousness (9:30), and graciously grafted them into the family tree. Paul says they now share in the "rich root of the cultivated olive tree." That rich root is the legacy of the patriarchs and the faithfulness of God to His people as revealed in Scripture.

Consider for a moment the Gentile as a group and how God dealt with them in the OT. Throughout the OT, Gentiles opposed the ways of God and fought the people of God. As a result, they often found themselves on the losing end of things. They were not great in God's sight; now they

Notes:

"The olive tree illustrates the relationship between Jew and Gentile in the program of God." (Be, 130)

However, Bruce does note that there might have been a practice in which wild branches were grafted into the unproductive cultivated trees. He argues that this process would reinvigorate the cultivated tree so that it becomes more productive. This thought does fit with the previous passage in which the Gentiles would spur Israel to salvation. (See TNTC, 204)

have been grafted into the greatness of God's family and God's plan. They should not boast in their new place because it is only by the grace of God that they have been let in. In a similar manner, we should not boast in our greatness. Instead, we should boast in the greatness of (1) He who grafted us in and (2) the great, redemptive plan in which God invites us to participate.

**2. They were Grafted in by Grace and Should Boast in Grace, not Works** (vv. 19-21). In verse 19, Paul acknowledges the underlying truth that some Gentiles might have expressed to justify their pride. It *was* true that some Jews "were broken off" and made room for the Gentiles. However, Paul reminds them that those Jews were broken off because of their unbelief. They were not "broken off" because God wanted the Gentiles more. The Gentiles' place in the kingdom of God was an issue of grace, not favoritism. The same applies to us today. We should not look too highly on ourselves just because we are Christians. Nor should we look down on those who are unbelievers. Instead, we should boast in God's grace that makes salvation possible.

**3. They were Grafted in by Faith and should Remain Faithful** (v. 22) "Therefore," Paul says in verse 22. In light of the greatness into which you were grafted and the grace-over-works manner in which you were grafted, "consider God's kindness and severity." God's kindness is manifest in salvation through faith by grace, not of works. God's severity is manifest in His just decision to let those who do not believe, even those from among His chosen people, face the judgment resulting from their decisions. God's kindness and severity must be understood in balance because God exercises them in tension. Hunter writes, "Neglect his severity, and we make of the Supreme Being a weak-kneed Benevolence. Ignore his goodness, and we turn the gracious Father of Christ into a ruthless Omnipotence." (NAC, 222, fn. 111) God is just in both the goodness of His grace and the severity of His judgment.

**Consider:** Why does Paul tell the Romans to consider His severity and His goodness? Why should believers today do likewise?

**Explain:** He does so because there are consequences if we in our pride we fail to understand both the goodness and severity of God. Paul concludes verse 22 with the words, "Otherwise you too will be cut off." Weymouth takes those same words and translates them so we can better understand, "You stand only through your faith." (NAC, 221) Bruce explains further, "Throughout the New Testament, continuance is the test of reality." (TNTC, 206) Lastly, Mounce reminds us, "There is no security for those who by their lives show that the grafting process of faith was apparent rather than real. (NAC, 222) In conclusion, we are grafted into something great through God's great grace because of faith, not works. Remember the goodness of that, but don't forget the severe reality of those branches that were pruned because of unbelief, and, oh yeah, make sure you really did place your faith in God and demonstrate that by living faithfully.

The Doctrine of the Cosmic Fall: "Man is part of 'nature,' and the whole 'nature' which he forms part was created good, had been involved in frustration and futility by sin, and will ultimately be redeemed." (TNTC, 160)

**Summarize and Transition:** Being chosen to be part of something great can make someone boastful and look down on others. The Gentile readers of Paul's letter and believers today are cautioned to avoid such thoughts. "As members of God's family, believers should embrace humility and resist spiritual pridefulness." (ETB LG, 105)

### 3. RESTORATION (ROM. 11:23-24)

**Read** (or have someone read) Romans 11:23-24.

**Explain:** Paul here returns to the first point of our lesson: Israel's revokable rejection. He makes his point about God's ability to save the unbelieving Jew and then uses the experience of the Gentile to prove his point. In verse 23a, Paul reminds us of the means by which we experience salvation: faith-filled belief in the work of Christ. If the unbelieving Jew simply believes, he will experience salvation. Moreover, he will experience salvation because of God's great power. "Paul defends verse 23 by pointing to the believing Gentiles' testimony (v. 24). If God can bring pagan Gentiles to faith, grafting them into the people of God, how much more can he incorporate the Jews who possess such spiritual privileges (9:4-5)... Israel's belief would simply be returning to 'their own tree' (Bird, Romans, 390)." (Exalting, 190)

**Summarize and Transition:** The great truth for us is once again reiterated that salvation is not won by works. Instead, it is received by faith because it was won by Christ on the cross. Even the hell-bent, hell-bound unbelieving Jew of Paul's day could be raised to newness of life in Christ. The same applies to our friends, relatives, acquaintances, and neighbors who have no interest in Christ or His redeeming work. "Believers can take comfort in knowing God had the power to save those who repent." (ETB LG, 107)

### CONCLUDE

We began our study talking about inviting others to a special event. Sometimes we are forced to limit who we can invite to such occasions. God is not limited in who He can invite to salvation. However, that does not mean everyone will accept his invitation. Moreover, we can be reminded that there is nothing inherently special about those of us who do accept His invitation.

How do we respond?

1. Don't give up on people. Keep persistently, patiently, and persuasively sharing the gospel message.
2. Guard against pride by remembering that we are saved by the grace of God.
3. Pray for those we need to find salvation in Christ.