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Warning: Gentile Arrogance

Romans 11.17-21

Series: The Pure Gospel

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The Village Church

October 19, 2025

I. Introduction

- A. How could he have fallen so far?
- B. He was, arguably, the greatest theologian of the Reformation
 - 1. His own personal struggles to find any semblance of righteousness of his own in the face of the holiness of God, threw his soul into turmoil
 - 2. If anyone was deeply acquainted with his own sin, indeed, his sinful nature, it was him
 - a. No amount of penance was able to placate his troubled heart
 - b. Because no amount of penance was able to satisfy the altogether righteous God
 - 3. Every attempt at confession and repentance left him empty
 - a. For he learned that there was nothing he could ever do to satisfy the righteousness of God
- C. Through the encouragement of a mentor, he plunged as deeply into the scriptures as he did into his own soul
 - 1. His mentor arranged for his appointment as a professor of theology
 - a. And he taught the scriptures to young, prospective priests
 - b. And when you teach something, you find you have to dive deeply into the subject
 - c. So that you are satisfied with every answer to every question
- D. At the same time, he was working in the context of a church that, by nearly every indication, was corrupt
 - 1. The clerics in Rome, the shepherds, from the Pope on down, were living lavish lifestyles
 - a. All the while their sheep, their constituents, peasants mostly, all over Europe, were living hand-to-mouth
 - b. In which creature comforts were few and far between
 - c. And in which the distance between health and death seemed merely a breath away
 - 2. And to make matters worse, Rome was more interested in building a monument to themselves, a new basilica
 - a. And money was tight; finances were hard to come by
 - b. So Rome raised money by fabricating a theological fiction
 - c. That by contributing indulgences, you could free a loved one from their time in purgatory

- d. Their infamous hawkster, Johann Tetzel, would act the traveling salesman
 - e. Crying out, “A coin in the coffer rings, and a soul from purgatory springs”
- E. So our professor of theology was afflicted
 - 1. In his soul by his own struggles at the wickedness he found therein
 - a. And in his position as a representative of an abusive church, which cynically took advantage of the peasant class to pad the pockets of elites
 - b. Who lived in comparative luxury, and gloried in their material monuments
- F. But in time the scriptures became his beacon of hope
 - 1. His deep dive into the scriptures led him to Galatians and then to Romans
 - 2. In those texts he discovered that, in fact, God knew that he (nor we) could do anything to satisfy divine righteousness
 - a. But that God in His mercy has provided His own righteousness
 - b. And through faith in Jesus Christ, He gave all who would ever believe in Christ the very righteousness of God
 - c. And He imputed it – transferred as it were – into our account
 - 3. And in so doing, He justified the believer
 - a. Removing the guilt
 - b. Granting us peace with God, without condemnation
 - c. And giving us access to the Father through Jesus Christ alone
 - 4. **Romans 3:21–25** (ESV) —
 - a. 21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—
 - b. 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:
 - c. 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
 - d. 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
 - e. 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.
- G. This discovery not only freed his own soul, but it also exposed the hypocrisy of the corrupt church
 - 1. And he began to see the plethora of errors perpetrated by the corrupt church
 - 2. And led him to seek to generate an academic conversation among his university colleagues about these matters
 - 3. He condensed his myriad thought into 95 theses, written in Latin, and tacked them up on the door of the church in Wittenberg
 - 4. And the rest, as they say, is history
 - a. The Latin was translated into German

- b. Gutenberg's invention was employed
 - c. And soon Martin Luther's ideas were spread all over Europe
- H. Martin Luther was a great theologian
 - 1. As I said earlier – arguably the greatest theologian of the Reformation
 - a. It's impossible to imagine the Reformation without Martin Luther
 - 2. His courage in the face of the Church's pressure and eventual excommunication is legendary
 - 3. His literary debates with the greatest scholars of his days, like the humanist Erasmus, defined the discourse of his day
 - 4. His insight into the gospel was incisive, precise, and pastoral
 - 5. His theological writings, like *The Bondage of the Will*, are among the most celebrated works which continue to be studied by theological students
- I. And yet, Martin's legacy was deeply tarnished
 - 1. His fall was deep and cast a shadow over his own heritage
 - a. Indeed, a blot even upon history well into the 20th Century
- J. For it was Martin Luther who said about the Jewish people that...
 - 1. The authorities should "set fire to their synagogues or schools"
 - 2. That their houses should "be razed and destroyed"
 - 3. That their "prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing, and blasphemy are taught, should be taken from them"
 - 4. That "their rabbis be forbidden to teach on pain of loss of life and limb"
 - 5. That "safe-conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews"
 - 6. And that "all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them"
- K. He said all this in a tract entitled *On the Jews and Their Lies*
 - 1. And he repeated these and similar epithets against the Jewish people in many other ways
 - 2. Such sentiments are surely appalling, and have been the stuff of study and debate among theologians and churchmen ever since
 - 3. How could such an eminent theologian, whose insights into scripture and understanding of the gospel were so God-glorifying and pastoral, fall into such a gross display of apparent anti-Semitism?
- L. The story is a complicated one
 - 1. It's a story that began well and ended poorly
 - 2. For early in Luther's career, around the early 1520's, he had great admiration for the Jews
 - a. And felt that they had been treated with gross oppression and persecution by the Roman church
 - b. He said that the Roman church was treating them "as if they were dogs"
 - c. That it was the corrupt church's fault that Jews would not come to faith in Christ
 - 3. Luther said at that time "I would request and advise that one deal gently with them... If we really want to help them, we must be guided in our dealings with them not by papal law but by the law of Christian love.

- a. “We must receive them cordially, and permit them to trade and work with us, hear our Christian teaching, and witness our Christian life.
 - b. “If some of them should prove stiff-necked, what of it? After all, we ourselves are not all good Christians either.”
 - 4. So far, so good
 - a. Luther believed that once the errors of the corrupt church were corrected, and that the gospel was recovered, Jews would much more quickly turn in faith to Messiah Jesus
 - b. So, what happened?
- M. Well, as time went on, the Jews didn’t convert
 - 1. And Luther became frustrated
 - a. He felt the Jews had become even more stiff-necked and hard-hearted
 - b. And that, as a result, they had been rejected by God
 - 2. The older Luther got, the more irritated and intransigent he became about the Jewish people
 - a. He felt that God’s rejection of the Jewish people was final and permanent
 - b. And he began to repeat infamous anti-Jewish tropes and rumors
 - 3. And this was a dark, dark time in the history of the Christian church with respect to our Jewish friends
- N. It is noteworthy that sometimes our words can have dangerous, ill effects, well beyond their immediate context
 - 1. For Luther’s own words were used to fuel the racial anti-Semitism of Hitler’s regime
 - 2. Now, in his “defense”, Luther’s views were not like Hitler’s
 - a. Hitler’s anti-Semitism was racial
 - b. That Jewish blood was inferior to his Aryan ideal race
 - 3. Luther’s rejection of the Jewish people was not racial; it was religious
 - a. If they would only come to faith in Jesus, that would have changed everything
 - b. In Hitler’s case, nothing would change anything; there needed to be a “final solution”
 - 4. Nevertheless, Luther’s deterioration of his views were indefensible theologically
 - a. And his fall in this regard was precipitous
- O. In the final analysis, Luther violated his own methods of biblical interpretation
 - 1. And he let contemporary circumstances mold his theology
 - 2. We have seen how wonderfully he understood Romans 3
 - a. And how much he affirmed the great doctrines of justification by faith alone from passages like Romans 3-5 and Galatians
 - 3. But somewhere along the line, Homer nodded
 - a. And he missed the text we are about to examine this morning
 - b. And he became arrogant

4. It's easy to become arrogant
 - a. Pride is arguably Satan's primordial sin
 - b. And it is one of chief reasons people – Gentile or Jew – do not come to Christ
 - c. It is probably the sin that, if we were honest, we all struggle with the most
5. And in Luther's case, it got the best of him
 - a. And in the history of the Christian church, he has had plenty of company
6. But in our text this morning, that should be laid to rest
 - a. There must be no arrogance, no anti-Semitism of any kind, by the Christian for our Jewish friends
 - b. And if Luther could fall so seriously, so could you and me

II. Text

A. **Romans 11:17–21** (ESV) —

1. 17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree,
2. 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches.
3. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you.
4. 19 Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in."
5. 20 That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear.
6. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you.

B. Let's walk through this text together

1. For it will keep us from Luther's error
 - a. And give us the spiritual resources to be a redemptive witness to our neighbors, Jew and Gentile alike

C. First, recall where we are in our study of Romans

1. Chapters 9-11 are driven by Paul's concern for the spiritual welfare of his kinsmen, his Jewish brothers and sisters
 - a. And in the process, he has been addressing some difficult biblical issues
 - b. Notably, since most Jews of Paul's day have not believe in Messiah Jesus, what does that say about God's promises not to forsake His people all through the Hebrew Bible?
2. There are a number of ways Paul approaches this issue
 - a. To which he, of course, strongly asserts that God could never finally reject His people, and could never fail to fulfill His promises
3. First, he teaches about election
 - a. That, as he shows from the Hebrew scriptures themselves, God saves everyone He elects

- b. And he uses the example of Jacob's choice over Esau
 - c. Even though they were from the same parents and had not done anything good or bad
 - 4. Next, he shows that the Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament, teaches that not all natural descendants from Israel would be saved, but that some Gentiles would be
 - 5. Third, he moves into the realm of human responsibility
 - a. And in Chapter 10 especially he shows that the scriptures teach that Jewish unbelief was their own fault
 - b. As they sought their salvation as if it were by works and not by grace
 - 6. Then Paul affirms that, in fact, some Jews have believed and been saved
 - a. He himself is the prime example!
 - b. And if one Jew is saved, He has fulfilled His word
 - c. Of course, many more Jews than just one have believed
 - d. And even today, many Jews are believers in Jesus
 - 7. Fifth, Paul shows from the Hebrew scriptures that God always has saved a remnant from Israel, even in the worst times of Jewish unbelief
 - a. And Elijah's testimony was used as an example
 - 8. And now, in this section, Paul is showing that Paul is using Jewish unbelief to save Gentiles
 - a. And in saving Gentiles, God is using that to provoke the Jewish people to envy
 - b. So that the Jewish people will come to faith in Jesus
- D. So this is the section where Paul explores the relationship between the Jewish people and Gentiles
 - 1. Let's see where he takes us

III. The Olive Tree

- A. Romans 11:17 (ESV) —
 - 1. 17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree...
- B. First, the text says, "the olive tree"
 - 1. There is one olive tree
 - a. And the olive tree represents the people of God
 - b. And that means there is only one people of God
- C. Now, as we'll see in a moment, the one people of God is made up of both Jews and Gentiles who believe in Messiah Jesus
 - 1. Those who have believed before Christ came believe based on the promises of God of the Messiah Redeemer – like Abraham
 - 2. Those who come after the coming of Christ believe on Jesus Himself – His person and His work
 - a. His life, death and resurrection

3. But whether one is Jewish or Gentile, belief on Messiah Jesus is what makes one a member of the people of God
4. And there is one people of God
- D. Now you might take that for granted, but you shouldn't, because there are Christians today who believe there are two "people of God"
 1. There is the church – that is one identifiable group
 2. And there is Israel
 - a. Who have a different, separate program for their redemption
 3. That is false!
 - a. And while we are seeing in this chapter that God has further plans for a large-scale Jewish coming to faith in Jesus, there is still only one people of God
 - b. One olive tree
 4. And this text destroys any notion of there being two separate people of God, two separate programs for the church v. Israel

IV. The Broken Branches

- A. Romans 11:17 (ESV) —
 1. 17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree...
- B. So, in this illustration it speaks of branches of this one olive tree that were broken off
 1. And those branches that were broken off represent Jewish people, who have been the recipients of such blessing as the covenant, the Law, the prophets, the sanctuary worship and all the rest
 - a. And yet, have not believed in the promises of God about the Redeemer
 - b. And have sought, as we have seen, to establish their own righteousness by obedience to the law instead of by faith
- C. Romans 11:19–20 (ESV) —
 1. 19 Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in."
 2. 20 That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith....
- D. We saw that same issue back in Romans 9
 1. Romans 9:30–32 (ESV) —
 - a. 30 What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith;
 - b. 31 but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.
 - c. 32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone...

- E. So, the broken branches in this illustration are members of national Israel, that is, naturally descended from Israel, who because of unbelief have been cut off from that one olive tree, the people of God

V. **The Wild Branches**

- A. **Romans 11:17** (ESV) —

- 1. 17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree...

- B. So now, these wild branches, which were grafted into this one olive tree, represent Gentiles

- 1. Who by faith in Messiah Jesus, are included in the one people of God
 - a. Into the one olive tree

- C. So Gentiles, wild because they did not have all the advantages of the Jewish people

- 1. Who did not have the history of the Jewish people having been redeemed from Egypt
- 2. Who did not have the covenant and the Law and the sanctuary worship
- 3. Who did not profit by the testimony of the prophets
 - a. Nevertheless, once they heard about how God so loved the world – Jew and Gentile – that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life
 - b. Believed in this Jesus
- 4. And were thus grafted into this one olive tree
 - a. And were included in the one people of God

- D. **Romans 11:19–20** (ESV) —

- 1. 19 Then you will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.”
- 2. 20 That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith....

- E. So it is by faith in Messiah Jesus that these Gentiles, these wild olive shoots, were grafted into this one olive tree

- 1. And have been included in the one people of God

VI. **The Nourishing Root**

- A. **Romans 11:17** (ESV) —

- 1. 17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree...

- B. So, the branches that are part of this one olive tree...

- 1. Jews who believe and have not been broken off
- 2. And Gentiles, those while olive shoots that were grafted in by faith
- 3. Both share in the nourishing root of the olive tree

- C. So, what is the nourishing root

- 1. Well, it's not just Judaism in general

- a. Because, as you know by reading the Hebrew Bible – our Old Testament – Judaism has been fraught with all kinds of periods of unbelief and rebellion
 - b. The period of the Judges was the classic example of mixture of failure and faith in the downward spiral that happened after Israel entered the promised land under Joshua
 - c. And that’s also what led to the collapse of the divided kingdom
 - d. The northern kingdom of Israel first, and then the southern kingdom of Judah
- 2. So the nourishing root is not Judaism in general
- D. No, the nourishing root is Abraham
 - 1. Abraham has been the touchstone of this entire section
 - a. Indeed, of the entire book of Romans
 - 2. For it was Abraham who “believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness” (**Romans 4**)
 - a. It was Abraham who was Paul’s prime example in teaching us the doctrine of justification by faith alone
 - b. It was Abraham that Paul uses to illustrate what it means to be a true Israelite (**Romans 9.7**)
 - 3. It’s possible, also, to expand this nourishing root from Abraham to the other patriarchs
 - a. For **Romans 11.28** speaks of being beloved “for the sake of their forefathers”
 - 4. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all were believers
 - a. All of them had their sins, to be sure
 - b. But all trusted in the promises of God alone
 - c. And were saved by the same faith that Abraham had
 - 5. So the nourishing root is, in fact Jewish
 - a. But Jewish in its expressions of faith
 - b. Not in its expressions of self-righteousness, as we have so clearly seen in our study of this section of Romans
- E. So, there is one olive tree, one people of God
 - 1. There are branches which were broken off from the one olive tree
 - a. Jews, who, through unbelief, were no longer included in the true people of God
 - 2. And there were wild branches that were grafted into the one olive tree
 - a. Gentiles, who by faith in Messiah Jesus were included in the one people of God
 - 3. And finally, those wild, Gentile branches then are nourished by the root of the one olive tree
 - a. The root which is decidedly Jewish
 - b. But believing Jewish
 - c. In which Abraham is the touchstone of faith
 - 4. So those of us who are Gentile believers in Jesus Christ find that we are more Jewish than we thought!

- a. For we are nourished by the Jewish root
 - b. Which is Abraham
 - c. And by extension, the forefathers
- F. If only Luther had seen it this way!

VII. Warnings and Instructions

- A. So, what does this all mean?
 - 1. What does the text say we should do about these truths?
 - a. One olive tree
 - b. Broken branches due to unbelief
 - c. Wild olive shoots grafted into the one olive tree
 - d. Believing branches then feeding off the nourishing root of the olive tree, the Jewish root of Abraham and the forefathers
 - 2. Here's what it says
- B. Romans 11:17–18 (ESV) —
 - 1. 17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree,
 - 2. 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you.
- C. “Do not be arrogant”
 - 1. But not just, don't be arrogant
 - a. But don't be arrogant toward a particular group of people
 - b. The “branches”
 - 2. Which branches is Paul referring to?
 - a. Well, he's referring to the broken branches
 - b. The Jewish people who have not yet believed
 - 3. Remember, the Jewish root supports you
 - a. Not the other way around!
- D. Romans 11:19–20 (ESV) —
 - 1. 19 Then you will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.”
 - a. [That's the beginning of arrogance, isn't it!]
 - b. [God got rid of them so He could bring me in! Aren't I special!]
 - 2. 20 That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear.
- E. There is no room for pride in faith
 - 1. Because faith, first, is a gift of God
 - a. And second, it is not in and of itself meritorious
 - 2. Faith is simply receiving a gift
 - a. The gift of salvation in Jesus Christ alone
 - 3. The only way you, Gentile, are part of the people of God is because of grace, through faith
 - a. And that, not of yourselves, it is the gift of God
 - b. So that no one may boast (Ephesians 2.8-9)

- F. So, do not become proud
 - 1. But... what?
 - a. Fear!
 - 2. Why?
- G. **Romans 11:21** (ESV) —
 - 1. 21 **For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you.**
- H. The minute you start thinking it's all about you
 - 1. That somehow you're better than "them"
 - a. Whoever "them" happens to be
 - 2. That you're smarter than them
 - a. Or wiser than them
 - b. Or more righteous than them
 - c. Or holier than them
 - 3. You are skating on thin ice
- I. Now, I believe Luther was saved
 - 1. But in his latter years, he was skating on thin ice
- J. Because, dear friends, in the final analysis
 - 1. Both Jews and Gentiles are included in the people of God – in the one olive tree – in exactly the same way
 - 2. Neither contribute anything to their salvation except their sin
 - 3. Both must humbly cast themselves on the mercy of God and trust in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in order to be saved
 - 4. And there is not an inch of room anywhere for arrogance toward our Jewish friends and neighbors
- K. Just the opposite
 - 1. Only room for genuine care and concern and love

VIII. **Examples**

- A. Certainly, this passage is primarily about individuals
 - 1. The branches, either broken off or grafted in, represent individuals
 - a. Jewish or Gentile
- B. But if we were to look at this culturally we can find examples that remind us of how nations and cultures, through arrogance and unbelief, have corporately been broken off again
 - 1. Asia Minor was once the center of gravity of Christianity for many centuries
 - a. Now, a spiritual wasteland, a graveyard of churches
 - 2. Europe – the center of western civilization
 - a. A civilization profiting by Christian influence, however plagued by schisms and corruptions
 - b. What is the current state of Christianity in Europe today
 - c. Where the great churches of the past are mere museums
 - 3. The United States
 - a. Arguably, Christian in its origin

- b. Meaning, not that everyone was individually Christian, or that our governmental structures were explicitly Christian
 - c. But that the primary moral influences were due to a general Christian consensus
 - d. Where is that consensus today?
 - C. “If God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you”
 - 1. That is the cautionary tale of our passage