

Pride Goes Before A Fall
Romans 11:17-24

It is amazing to look at the human heart, and the pride of life that is in it. Someone has once said the moment that you truly believe that you are humble, you are struggling with pride. We are constantly trying to evaluate and see how much better than we are of other people. We are trying to find our superiority over others. You can see it in bigotry towards others or class elevation and economic distinctions or through gender and the differences of man and woman. We are critical of people that are not like us. We want to show that we are somehow and someway morally superior to others. You see it in workplaces. The vast majority of labourers and those in management think that they are far better employees, managers or whatever than their counterparts. And you can even see that in households that pride and self-righteousness runs so deep. Pride is one of those sins that when we see it in others it is detestable because we realize that person is not as great as they think but it is so hard to recognize it in ourselves, because we are such good self-deceivers and really believe that we are better than most. Let me ask you: do you think that you are a better spouse than your spouse, that if he or she would get their life together, then life would be better? Do you find that you are so often criticizing others just for the sake of criticizing? Sure we are all sinners but I am not the main problem. And to say that pride is a huge problem in our lives would be an understatement.

And the ramifications of thinking that we are better than others is we have less patience and time and energy for others who are below us or inferior to us. We are less thankful for the wonderful grace of God through Jesus Christ. We do not run to God in our weakness because we really believe that we are not that weak. We have little time or empathy for those who struggle with sin and following God thinking that they just need to pull up their boot straps and do better. And in pride we down play the significance of our own sin as minor things because after all look at all the things we do right, and we over-emphasize the sins and misdeeds of others. We overemphasize the things we do right and undervalue the righteousness of others. Pride has self as sovereign and king. Pride says look at me, and causes us to hate others who do not measure up. You can hear it such phrases as, "what he did is unforgivable." Or, "there is no hope for her." We think that we have arrived and God should and does applaud us. It is more that God needs me than I need him.

And there is nothing so blinding as religious pride. And it seems that some that happen to be in Roman church were looking down on unbelieving Israel. And they probably had much to work with. After all, many in Israel saw the miracles of Christ but did not believe on him. They were given clear Old Testament prophecies but did not see their clear fulfillment in Jesus. They were responsible for their opposition and they were one of the main players in putting Christ to death. We didn't see those miracles or have the prophets yet we have believed. We are so much better than them. You see it even among believes today. We talk about unbelievers as being stupid or being more worthy of God's wrath than we are. We forget that if God did not take his gospel and shine in our hearts, if he did not give us the grace of new life we would curse Christ just as the worst of sinners. We can even look down on others that might have an inferior knowledge of the Scriptures as us, or maybe be of a different theological persuasion.

There is the caricature of the proud Calvinist that is there for a reason. One of the most glorious attributes that God wants all of us to have is a humble heart, but it is probably the one attribute that believers in Christ so rarely seek after. How important is humility in your life?

And humility comes by recognizing how needy I really am, and how gracious God is. Humility allows us to come to God and God will come to you. Listen to the promise in James 4:6, **“But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’”** There is one way that you can turn God against you and that’s is to be proud, to think more highly of yourself than you ought, to look down on others. And there is one way in which God draws near us and that is when we are humble and needy. I want us to see two things that we have to remember to combat pride in our lives -two things that we have to bring back to our minds.

1. We have to remember who we are. Vv.17-18.

This is hard for us because it is so easy for us to compare ourselves to others. We forget so often the need of God’s grace. Can you think of anything more humbling than bankruptcy? A person is unable to pay his debts. His expenses exceed the money coming in, and he is entirely of want, and there is that feeling of helplessness. There is nothing that I can do. We realize that in chapters 1-3 Paul shows us our spiritual bankruptcy. But there is a great deal of difference between those who are financially bankrupt and those who are spiritually bankrupt, and the difference is the financial needy realize it but the spiritual needy do not realize it. We would rather give than receive. And the gospel says that we have to stoop before God. We are needy. We have to remember who we are. And if you are struggling with certain people and relations, if you are angry and bitter towards others, let me ask you if you remember who you are before God? If you want others to suffer do you remember what you deserve before God?

So look at verse 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.”** What Paul is doing in this verse is continuing on his metaphor of verse 16 about the tree and the whole tree being set aside for God. And right here he says that some of the branches were broken off, and of course he is talking about Israel. And notice that it is just some branches but not all. God has saved a remnant of Israel even to this very day. He has broken off some because of unbelief but not all. And then he talks about Gentile or non-Jewish believers and notice what he calls them - “a wild olive shoot.” They have not been cultivated and been taken care of. And yet here they have been grafted in, and the process that takes unproductive branches off a tree and grafts new branches in that they might be productive because they take the rich nutrients of the root system. And this is talking about the Gentiles salvation that came through the same faith as Abraham and the other Patriarchs and also by trusting in the Jewish Messiah. They have become recipients of that salvation.

And let me say that this is not the normal practice to take wild and unproductive branches and graft them in because they would still be unproductive. And that is what wild branches are. They have not been cultivated and care for. If you have ever seen a wild apple tree, its apples and fruit if there is any are usually small and not very good.

But why Paul presents it this way is to prick their conscience if they are thinking too highly of themselves that the reason that they have been grafted in and given life through Christ has nothing to do with them but has every thing to do with Christ. One commentator says that the grafting in of the Gentiles is a “miracle of grace.”

And this really puts us all on the same footing also. There is only one people of God. There is not a Jewish people of God during this age and a Gentile church but one people of God. We all have the same problem - we are sinners, and we all come to Christ through his grace. All of us whether Jew or Gentiles need the life of Christ. We need to be grafted in and only he can do that work. That is one of the marvellous outcomes of Christianity is that it really does destroy racism. All are needy and that need met in Christ. And when they come all belong to that same tree. We have that same Lord and same standing in Jesus Christ. One of the bitter fruits of pride is racism, and one of the fruits of divine grace is humble love of all the brethren regardless of who they are. We all get our life from the same root system.

So as believers in Christ who enjoy the great blessings of Christ that was first promised to Israel, look at what verse 18 says, **“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.”** This exhortation suggests as we have already said that they seem to be some negative attitudes toward Israel. This might have resulted because of an edict made by Claudius in AD49 that banished all Jews from Rome. So it could be that when this church was established that there had very little contact and interaction with any Jewish believers. And based on Israel’s rejection of the Messiah and their acceptance of Him, and God’s acceptance of them - they might have assumed that God had rejected Israel in favour of them. They are somehow superior to Israel.

And this is where when we look at the human plane, and how God has providentially worked in the world we are indebted to the Jews and the work that God has done with them. He says “the root supports you.” And he is still talking about Abraham and the other Patriarchs whose the promises were given and whom Jesus would come forth. God has chosen to work through this nation.

And the basic message here is that we do not deserve this salvation. We were the wild shoot. We have been grafted into the wonderful promises of God that are ours through Jesus Christ. And our current Christianity is seeking self worth. You are a somebody before God. You should feel good about you being you. And we have bought into that. We want people to constantly whisper in our ears what a wonderful person you are. And if they don’t then we are told to whisper it to ourselves. We are better than most, and that is why God loves us. And the cross of Christ confronts that arrogant attitude and message. It indicates what you and I deserve for all of eternity. We deserve the cross. We deserve punishment and shame and God’s wrath forever and ever. Look at that awful and gory scene of the crucifixion and that is what we deserve. And yet we have been grafted in and we could not even do that work ourselves. I do not get my sense of joy and well-being by looking how wonderful I am, but by looking how wonderful and gracious he is. Let’s me ask you: have you forgotten who you are? Have you forgotten the wonderful grace of God and your daily need of that grace? Have you been comparing yourself to others? God is opposed to the proud but gives his grace to the humble. Humble people run to God. The proud run away and oppose him.

2. The second way that we combat pride is realizing salvation is by faith. Vv. 19-20.

It is amazing how much boasting there is among those who happen to be among God's children. We are many times enamoured that God selected us, or that we have figured out the message where others have not. And faith in Christ as always terminated any boasting, any pride in self. It humbles us to realize that the only ground of my acceptance is through the work and righteousness of another. I bring nothing into my salvation. I can add nothing or make my standing before God more complete. It is faith in Christ plus nothing. As people who always have to battle pride, we must be aware of our deceptive hearts that always want to hypocritically judge others and be so blind to the arrogance and sin in our own life. God has never needed you or I. We come through faith alone.

So look at what Paul says here, "**Then you will say, 'Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.'**" Here is the Gentile believer still arguing some sort of moral superiority over unbelieving Israel. And they were broken off in order that I might be grafted in. And the chief word in this argument is the word "I." In other words I am at the centre of the purposes of God. He agrees that he has been grafted in but in order for that to take place others less worthy had to be discarded. They had to be cut off or thrown away. And we can often look at our skills or gifts and think this is the reason why God chose me. Preachers often suffer from that. I can preach, and I can influence others and therefore others need me and by extension God needs me. Or look at my learning and insight that I have over others. I am so educated in the Scriptures. God knew I would be this valuable tool so he grafted me in over others who would not be so dedicated. Or look how loving I am compared to others. I care for the body of Christ like no one else does.

And look at Paul's answer he gives in verse 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.**" What a terrific answer on two fronts. The first is that he does agree, that the Gentile believer has been grafted in while other unbelieving Jews had been cut off. But the believer is not the centre of God's program. Everything, including the eternal plans of God does not revolve around him. We just saw that in the preceding verses that one of the reasons why God has chosen many non-Jews is to elicit a response of jealousy so that as they see the blessings of God in Christ that they are enjoying that they would come to Christ. It is nothing but egotism that thinks that you are then centre of God's program and that God needs you or me. And the second point that depletes any sense of pride and superiority is us is that it is faith and faith alone that makes the difference. The reason many of Israeli were cut off is because of unbelief, and the reason for the inclusion of many is because of faith - faith in Christ, so Christ is the one who makes the difference and not them. The Jews in earlier chapters boasted about their status and their accomplishments and here you see the same thing. It is amazing how sin and pride keep repeating itself.

So Paul says, "**do not become proud, but fear.**" There needs to be a healthy fear of God, and that fear and reverential awe of God produces humility. If the Jews were rejected because they did not place their faith in Christ then we can assume the same will be for any of us. If we base our standing and status and our right to be called

God's children on anything else but faith in Christ we can expect nothing but the judgment of God. Again, what and who are you trusting in? How would you end this sentence: God accepts me because ? We all know Eph. 2:8 but let me just quote it here, **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”** Salvation is through faith in Christ alone. The righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to us is the only thing that separates us from others. So listen to the response of realizing that salvation is by grace alone, Ephesians 2:9, “not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” There is no boasting, it kills pride.

So let me end with a few ways to cultivate humility before God. First, remember that Jesus was humbled for our pride. If God humbles the proud then, because we are guilty of pride God the Father humbled the Son. He paid the penalty for our pride. Again, if you want to see how ugly and what our pride deserves, when you are tempted to place yourself as more worthy of others or you have an unforgiving attitude just look at the cross. Second, recognized that Jesus atoned for my pride. He actually took the punishment and penalty that I deserve. God hates our pride and he poured out his wrath on the Son that we might have life. He sent his Son to pay the penalty for our arrogance. If that does not humble you, I really do not know what will.

Thirdly, the more we meditate on this truth presented by the apostle Paul, the more we want to pursue humility. Meditating on the humility of Christ causes us to hate pride and pursue his humility. Remember Phil. 2:5-8, **“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”** Meditate on what he has done for proud people - it will change you.

Are you proud? And here is the encouragement: there is hope for the proud. Christ came and died for us, and because he has come and grafted us into him, we can now become humble servants of an amazing Lord. Keep your eyes forever focussed on the Author and Finisher of our faith - Jesus Christ. There is so much joy in that humble life before him.