

97-02-02a

As we continue our worship service this morning for our Scripture reading, turn with me to Amos chapter 9, Amos chapter 9. To put this in a little bit of context, you'll remember that we are looking at Romans chapter 11, and we'll continue that study this morning where we see God's dealings with the nation of Israel. We saw last week that they are pictured as branches in the tree of God's plan, specifically His plan for human beings to bear fruit, and in that connection those branches are broken off, and the question that Paul raises is, has God cast off His people? The prophets are the place to go when you want to see God's displeasure with the nation of Israel. The prophets almost universally bring a message of warning, of impending discipline, of judgment for disobedience, for apathy, for faithlessness on the part of God's people.

God consistently calls them His people, and He says He is their God, and yet He is going to discipline them. This is one such passage. Amos chapter 9, verse 1, I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and He said, Strike the doorposts that the thresholds may shake, and break them on the heads of them all.

I will slay the last of them with the sword. He who flees from them shall not get away, and he who escapes from them shall not be delivered. Though they dig into hell, from there my hand shall take them.

Though they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down. And though they hide themselves on top of Carmel, from there I will search and take them. Though they hide from my sight at the bottom of the sea, from there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them.

Though they go into captivity before their enemies, from there I will command the sword, and it shall slay them. I will set my eyes on them for harm and not for good. The Lord God of hosts, He who touches the earth and it melts, and all who dwell there mourn, all of it shall swell like the river, and subside like the river of Egypt.

He who builds His layers in the sky, and has founded His strata in the earth, who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the face of the earth, the Lord is His name. Are you not like the people of Ethiopia to me, O children of Israel, says the Lord? Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt? The Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir? Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth. Yet I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, says the Lord.

For surely I will command and will sift the house of Israel among all nations, as grain is sifted in a sieve. Yet not the smallest grain shall fall to the ground. All the sinners of My people shall die by the sword, who say the calamity shall not overtake nor confront us.

After this pronouncement of severe judgment on the nation of Israel and the people of God, He follows that with a promise, and this is often the pattern in the prophets. On that day I will raise up

the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages. I will raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does this thing.

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes, him who sows seeds. The mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will bring back the captives of My people Israel.

They shall build the waste cities and inhabit them. They shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them. They shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them.

I will plant them in their land, and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them, says the Lord your God." The picture that we see consistently, again, especially in the prophets in the Old Testament, is that because of disobedience, because of apathy and faithlessness, Israel as a nation comes under discipline from God, and severe discipline. When you read the first part of this chapter, they cannot escape, it doesn't matter where they go. Even in their captivity, God says, I will chase them down with the sword.

Not a single one of them misses out on this. When you look at the ninth verse here, surely I will command and will sift the house of Israel among all nations like grain is sifted in a sieve, yet not the smallest grain shall fall to the ground. Remember Paul's words in Romans, Israel has not attained what it sought.

It sought its own righteousness and not attained it. Has Israel stumbled so as to fall? God forbid. May it never be.

Meganoita, the strongest negative in the New Testament. God has not abandoned His people. God has not forsaken His people.

They have not stumbled so as to fall. But through their trespass, deliverance has come to the Gentiles. And there's a reminder here, after this tremendous statement of discipline coming on Israel, God says, even though they're scattered through the nations and all of this befalls them, not the smallest grain will fall to the ground.

God knows every single individual Israelite. And even as they die the sin unto death, even as they fall under the sword, there's not a single grain that falls to the ground because God knows them that are His. Turn with me now to Romans chapter 11 and let's remind ourselves of the theme of the book.

It is so important in the deeper theological sections of Scripture to respect the context. And one of the easiest ways for us to get confused or to have a wrong understanding is to not remember who is being spoken to, what is being spoken about, and what the purpose of that speaking is. And we put all of that under the heading of context.

Who's being addressed, what's being talked about, and what's the purpose? Anytime we quote a single verse, we have to be sure that that verse and the meaning that we assign to it and the reason that we're quoting it is accurate and is proper for the context in which that verse is found. We often go and say, my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches and glory in Christ Jesus, and we claim that as a promise. It's important for us to remember what the context is.

Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to participate in an opportunity to help fellow believers who are in need. He says, if you all participate in this, my God shall supply your needs. You're not going to lack because you sacrifice material things on behalf of other believers.

And that's the context. And we can't just claim that when we're apathetic, when we're indifferent, and we suddenly find ourselves under discipline from God and missing out on logistical support from God, and then say, well, God, you said right here, my God shall supply all your needs, and I've got a need, and it's not being supplied. What happens? We question our faith, and we start falling apart.

It's because we haven't understood the conditions under which that promise is true. Many believers are going to arrive in the eternal future, arrive at the judgment seat of Christ, expecting inheritance and expecting reward. Well, am I not an overcomer? Am I not going to rule and reign with Christ? Am I not going to walk with Him in white and have the white stone and the new name and sit with Him on His throne and rule the nations with a rod of iron with Him and all of the other promises? How come I'm missing out on all this? We are heirs according to promise, and we have to know what that promise is.

And those rewards and those opportunities are contingent on our pursuit, our asking and seeking and knocking and seeking to be the called. So we put these things in context. As we come to Romans chapter 11, people have often come to this chapter, and we have people who believe that salvation can be gained and lost, perhaps many times over the course of one's life.

And they come to this passage and say, see, here's the tree. This is the tree of salvation. These Israelites who had the opportunity to be the people of God didn't express faith in God, and so they were snapped off and snapped out of the tree, and the Gentiles have been grafted in, and now the Gentiles can be saved.

And then they look and say, God says if He did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. And if you're not faithful and if you don't acknowledge Jesus as Lord and if you're not obedient and if you don't bear some fruit in your life, well, you can be snapped right back out of the tree and lose your salvation. Why do people come to that conclusion? Because they do not understand the context of this passage.

They haven't looked at the theme of the book, who is being spoken to and what's being talked

about. We've reviewed this many times, but we're going to review it again. This is a letter written to believers in a church, the church in Rome.

There were actually several house churches that met in Rome in various places, and we'll find when we get to chapter 16 that Paul greets these different groups and the believers who assemble there. There is a mixture of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. The Jewish Christians, by and large, began as observant Jews who worshipped in the synagogue, who studied the Old Testament, who at some point heard the gospel of Jesus Christ and accepted Him as their Savior, and yet have a misunderstanding of what God requires.

They're still living in the Old Testament age, and they're still making the mistake that was made in the Old Testament age, which is believing that righteousness comes by what we do instead of what God does, and that trusting God for what He will do is the means of pleasing Him and the means of walking the worthy walk. It wasn't so much that the Old Testament age required works, but that was the mistake that Israel fell into. That's why they come under so much discipline in the Old Testament, is they began by getting into works for righteousness and departing from faith, and once they've departed from faith, the power goes out of their life, and the next thing you know, they're compromising with the inhabitants of the land, they're tolerating idolatry, pretty soon they accept idolatry, pretty soon they intermarry with idolaters, pretty soon they themselves are participating in idolatry, and it's like the water that heats up with the frog in it.

The frog doesn't realize that he's getting closer and closer to his own destruction because it's a gradual process. It's acceptable. Everyone around them was doing the same thing, and they many times did not go back to the core of their faith, the core of the commandments that God had given.

We've seen what Moses told them in Deuteronomy and in Exodus, when he conveyed the Word of God that said, what does the Lord require of you but to know and do His will, to love Him with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength, and they would get into just observing the law as a system, and many people thought, well, this is good, we'll train people to do these things and it'll work its way in and become faith and become love for God. And we saw what happened to Israel, that did not work out, and that nation was destroyed and has been a non-entity for nearly 2,000 years and will continue actually to be a non-entity until God reconstitutes the nation at the return of Christ. So that's the environment, that's the situation in which Paul is writing this letter, and he is writing it to correct an understanding of how life is to be lived for believers.

What are we supposed to do? We're Christians, we're going to heaven, we're not going to the lake of fire. After salvation, what? Should we run around and try to do good deeds? Should we try to evangelize? Should we try to engage in ministry? Should we try to have an impact? Is that our goal? And if so, how best do we do that? That was the question in the early days of the church, and Paul said we need to understand that those things are a byproduct and a result of pursuing the goal. The goal is knowing and trusting the Word of God, coming to know God personally, and

when we have Him at work in us to will and to do His good purpose, we will then be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So there's a cart and there's a horse. The horse is faith and the cart is ministry and evangelism and all of the things that come from it. That's the situation in Israel, wasn't it? If people were faithful and loved God and loved one another, it was easy, it was second nature to perform the works of the law, to be an observant, law-keeping Israelite, and to do it from the heart.

The sacrifices that they brought meant something. You read the account of Job, even before the Mosaic law was given, who, in the days of the family priesthood, offered sacrifices on behalf of his children, and he was thinking about them. He was concerned about them.

Perhaps they have committed a sin. I'll offer a sacrifice on their behalf. That was the system, the family priesthood.

And he cared about them. He didn't want them to come under discipline, and when he offered his sacrifices it was out of love for God, out of respect for God, and also love for his family and concern for them. They came from the heart.

It wasn't a superficiality. It wasn't a good luck charm. It wasn't a means of being thought of as righteous by his neighbors.

But that was the trap that Israel fell into, and in the early days of the church, that was what the church was falling into, and was being actively encouraged to fall into by these Jewish Christians. So Paul wrote this letter, and he says, it's faith. Look at Abraham.

He was declared righteous by faith in chapter four. That's our calling in chapter eight. If we love God, if we see that we are the call according to his purpose, all things work together for good.

He has pre-designated us to be conformed to Christ's image, so that Christ can be the firstborn among many brethren. He has made all of the provision necessary to declare us righteous, to glorify us now and in the eternal future with Christ, but we have to seize onto it by faith. So the question arises, well now what about Israel? Israel missed that boat.

We're being encouraged to catch that boat and sail it. What about Israel? And in chapter nine, ten, and eleven, Paul addresses the subject of Israel. What about Israel? Has God abrogated the covenant? Has he abandoned his promises to Israel? Paul says not at all.

And he has been offering the principles and the promises to Israel that God has not abandoned his people. He has left a remnant. There is a seed.

Otherwise, they would have been like Sodom and Gomorrah and there would have been no continuance. But there is a seed that continues. He said this in chapter nine, verse twenty-nine, unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom and we would

have been made like Gomorrah.

What shall we say then in nine thirty? The Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness, i.e. they didn't try to be declared righteous by works, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith. The Gentiles were able to cut to the chase. They didn't have to become a part of the nation of Israel and operate under the law and fall into the mistakes that the Jews did with the law.

They were presented with the gospel in this age, after Christ, after Pentecost, and they have stepped out on faith. God didn't give them the law. God didn't make them a nation and give them a culture and a legal system.

He said, here is the Savior. Trust Him. Here is the Word of God.

Trust it. He didn't make it the object of faith and the Gentiles latched on to that and they didn't go through the ritual system and they have attained the righteousness of faith. But Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, or righteousness by the law, has not attained to the law of righteousness.

Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. They stumbled at that stumbling stone. That's his theme there.

And so then in chapter eleven, verse one, I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not. He says, I myself am an Israelite. I've come from the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. And we've seen that God's foreknowledge recognizes ahead of time and made provision and predestinated those who are going to respond in faith. Those believers who are not going to just be believers, but are going to pursue righteousness by faith, who are going to be overcomers, who are going to be in the category of inheritance and reward, and will be known by God, will be confessed by Jesus Christ and all of the other rewards that we have seen.

And he quotes Elijah out of first Kings, Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars. Who is the they that have killed the prophets and torn down the altars? It's not the Gentiles. It's not the Syrians.

It's not the Babylonians. It's Israelites, disobedient, apathetic people of God, have torn down the altars, have killed the prophets. What would be the equivalent of that today? What does the altar and what does the prophet represent in the Old Testament? What does an altar represent? What is the altar? That's the place of contact with God, isn't it? Those sacrifices, the sin offering, the guilt offering, that's the place of fellowship with God.

That's the place of restoration. That's the place of claiming the sacrificial blood by which remission of sins comes. It's the place of contact.

It's the place of renewal. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by Him.

He's represented. His work is pictured at the altar. If you tear down the altar, what are you doing? You're disregarding the point of contact.

You're not claiming the blood of Christ for forgiveness and cleansing as a believer. You're not being restored and coming to God and worshipping and being in communion with Him. So, when they tear down the altars, what are they doing? They're worshipping at some other altar.

They're communing with some other perceived source of prosperity or source of blessing or source of stimulation. They're going down to the house of prostitution, the temple prostitutes that were a part of the pagan religions. That's their pursuit.

What does it mean when they kill the prophets? What's the function of a prophet? We just studied the gift of prophecy, the New Testament gift of prophecy, night before last under the ministries of the Holy Spirit. The prophets foretold, communicated the word of truth. All they had in writing in most of the age of Israel was the Torah.

And as they gradually accumulated writings, where did those come from? They came from the prophets. That was where the inspired word of God. Peter says men spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

And those things were many times recorded in writing. Many times they were not. But those prophets communicated the word of God and the truth of God.

If you kill the messenger, what happens to the message? It's rejected. It's not heard. It's not heeded.

It's completely out of the picture. This is what believers were doing in the nation of Israel. And Elijah says, Lord, that's what they're doing.

And now they're seeking my life. I'm a prophet and they're trying to kill me. What does the divine response say? I have reserved for myself 7,000 men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.

And even so, there is at this present time a remnant according to the election of grace, according to the choosing based on grace. This word election is very interesting. I'd like to spend just a couple of minutes on this concept of election.

It's one of the terms that is significant. The Calvinist reformed theology devotes a lot of time and attention to the elect and in that view, God sovereignly elects. God more or less randomly chooses some for salvation and fails to choose others.

And by failing to choose them, of course, they are consigned to eternal damnation. But what does it mean? What does elect or election really mean? The Greek word behind this is eklego or eklegomai, depending on whether you look at it in its active or its middle form. Lego, the root part of this, is the same word that gives us logos.

And the inherent meaning, the original root meaning of Lego and all of its derivatives is to collect. It meant to gather together or to collect. Now, how did we get from that to logos? Well, it began by when you collect things, if you're out collecting fruit, what do you do? Well, you might count it to find out how much you have.

And so you enumerate something. You specify exactly what it is or you count it. And so Lego came to be used for counting things.

And it eventually came to be used for collecting together things and collecting together words. You collect together concepts or words. And so in John 1, 1, when you have, in the beginning was the logos and the logos was with God and the logos was God, what are we talking about? Christ is the fullness of the deity.

In Him, all the deity dwells in bodily form. He is the collection of everything that is God. He brings it all together in one place.

When the Word of God is communicated, when the truth is spoken forth, it's the collection of truth about God. We're conveying a collection of ideas and principles, promises, doctrines and so forth. Well, ek, the first part of eklego or ekloge, e-k-l-o-g-e is the noun we have here in verse 5 of chapter 11.

Ek means out from. And so if you collect or gather out, you're selecting something. You're making a choice.

You're making a selection. This is a selection according to grace. What is the means of claiming the grace of God? How do we qualify for the grace of God? What puts us in the place of receiving God's grace? It's our choice.

It's our volition, isn't it? God holds out His hands. He held out His hands to Israel. He says all day long, in fact, Paul quotes that.

All day long, I have held out my hands to a disobedient and stiff-necked people. The grace of God was available. The grace of God was being offered to Israel.

And Israel chose against it. And yet there was a remnant that received God's grace that were reserved by God, were selected by God for preservation, for blessing, for continuance. What was the basis of that selection? It was their response to His grace.

I will honor those who honor Me, God says. Over in 1 Samuel, in the context of Eli and his

disobedient sons who are priests to God, who are manifestly believers and yet who are disobedient, and in the context of pronouncing discipline and judgment and the sin unto death on Eli and his sons, God says I will honor those who honor Me. I will select them for blessing.

They are going to be the chosen. They are going to be the special. They are the pre-designated to fulfill My purpose.

They are going to be the fruitful branches in My tree. Those who dishonor Me, it says in the quaint language of the old King James, I will lightly esteem, which is the understatement of the Bible. If God lightly esteems you, you better stand by.

Remember Amos chapter 9 for our Scripture reading? That's what happens when God lightly esteems. You can't climb into heaven. You can't go to the depths of the sea.

There is no place to escape His eye and His sword and His wrath and judgment. I will honor those who honor Me. Why would God select someone for a special purpose? Why would God make someone the elect? There is a basis for it and it's clearly given in the Word of God.

It's not the inscrutable, unknowable, arbitrary choice of God. And He doesn't choose so that we will choose. He chooses us based on our choice.

He holds His hands out to everyone. It is not the will of God that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. God loved the world and gave His sons so that whosoever believeth should not perish.

God can choose for blessing. God can choose for perishing. Be not deceived.

God is not mocked. For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that sows to the flesh of the flesh reaps corruption.

He that sows to the Spirit of the Spirit reaps life everlasting. Life that partakes of the divine. Life that partakes of the eternal.

It's what we choose to do. Look at the parable of the talents. God gives each of the servants a coin.

They decide what they do with the coin. And God either honors or dishonors based on that choice. Don't let anyone tell us that we're pretty much victims of God's arbitrary choice.

God elected some and didn't elect others. And it's all predetermined. It's determined by our choice.

And that's the reason that there is so much exhortation in Scripture. What's the point of exhortation? What's the point of imperatives if it's all going to happen anyway? It's all been predetermined by God's sovereign will. Not at all.

So when He says that there is a remnant according to the election of grace, God's choosing. God's gathering out. God is looking at a group and He's going to gather out.

Ech Lego. He's going to gather out from a larger group, those who qualify. And this is a grace choice.

Just because we qualify doesn't mean we can break our arm patting ourselves on the back. This is expected. This is what everyone ought to be doing.

We don't get credit for doing what we ought to be doing, but we can certainly get discipline and judgment for failing to do what we ought to do. And there's no merit in responding to God's gracious call and all of the wonderful things that God has done in grace. We didn't save ourselves.

We didn't redeem ourselves. We didn't earn or deserve anything of God's favor. But the least we can do is accept it when He offers it and respond to grace.

And when we respond, God chooses us out. If we love God, if we see that we are called according to His purpose, He can work all things together for good. He can declare us righteous.

He can graft us into the tree that bears fruit. He can prune us so that we will bear more fruit. But if we don't respond and if we sit there in the tree and bear no fruit, He will snap that branch off our life and judgment.

That's what we're seeing here in Romans 11. So, what about Israel? Israel was a natural olive tree and many, many of those branches, most of those branches did not bear fruit. They were plugged into the trunk and bore no fruit.

And God broke those branches off. Paul says in verse 19 of chapter 11, You will say then, branches were broken off that I might be grafted in. Well said.

Good. That's what he says. That's accurate.

That's right. They were broken off so that you could be grafted in. Because of what? Apostasy.

Because of faithlessness. Lack of trust. Where does faith come from? What are the components of faith? You have to know the Word of God first, right? You have to have something to trust.

Faith is not an abstract sort of a wish, is it? Faith is acknowledging that what God says, in fact we have a children's song that says, faith is just believing what God says He will do. He will never fail us. His promises are true.

That's faith. We have to know what God has said. If somebody walks up to you that you've never seen before and they say, trust me.

For what? What's the context? What am I trusting you for? You have to know what God has said. So the Word of God, the promises of God, the principles of operation, His character, His grace, His love, all of the parts of His essence are the object of our faith and we have to know about those from the Word of God. And being made aware of those, we have to treat that as reality and act accordingly.

It's not enough to acknowledge these things in an academic sense. Remember when it talks about the demons, even the demons believe and tremble? Well, that's not saving faith. That's not delivering faith, is it? They acknowledge the truth about God.

None of the demons argue that God is sovereign and righteous and just and loving and omnipotent and so forth. They don't argue with any of that. But they don't respond to it.

They don't hupotaso. They don't make themselves obedient to that. They don't place themselves under the authority of God and respond to His purpose and His call.

They've rejected all of that. They've rebelled against it. They acknowledge it.

They just don't act accordingly. Faith is not only acknowledging the truth of something, but living in the light of it, acting accordingly. So because of lack of faith, because of faithlessness, they were broken off.

And you stand by faith. Our position in the branch, that branch being plugged into the trunk, the opportunity to bear fruit and to be productive and to be pleasing to God exists based on our faith. If we are faithless, He remains faithful.

He cannot deny Himself. We're not going to lose our salvation, but we can be snapped out of the tree of God's purpose, the tree of the fulfillment of God's plan. If we're not bearing fruit, we'll be snapped off so that somebody else can be grafted in and take that opportunity.

You stand by faith. Do not be arrogant. Don't be sitting there thinking, well, all is well.

I don't have to worry. I've been plugged into the tree. This is what we do today in Christianity, isn't it? We think, well, I'm saved and I know that I am and that's what counts.

I'm going to be walking the streets of gold. I'm going to have the mansion. I'm going to have all the blessings and rewards.

And all these poor pagan unbelievers are not. And we become complacent. And we don't have a sense of urgency.

We don't feel the need to learn more about God's plan to pursue in our daily activities reverence for God and reflecting who we are and why we're here. He says, don't be arrogant. Don't be complacent.

But fear. Why? If God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. There is a possibility for us in the church age to be snapped out of the tree.

We know by that statement alone that this is not the tree of salvation because you cannot undo a birth. You can't be unborn. And Paul says, consider the goodness and severity of God on those who fell severity, but toward you goodness if you continue in His goodness.

What is the condition for grace here? Wouldn't you say that God's goodness is an expression of His grace? What's the condition for being chosen to be a recipient of God's grace here in verse 22? Toward you goodness if you continue in His goodness. It's your choice. If you continue in His goodness, you're going to receive goodness.

To him who has, more will be given. To him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. If you continue in His goodness, you'll receive goodness.

Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And that's a promise of the Word of God. If you do not continue in God's goodness, you will be cut off.

This is not necessarily a permanent cutting off and we know that from what follows. They also, if they do not continue in faithlessness, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. And we can be in the tree or out of the tree at various stages in our life depending on whether we respond and begin to wake up and recognize where we are, that we need to have a change of mind, that we need to continue in God's goodness.

We may be snapped out by discipline. What's the purpose of discipline? It's for correction. It's to turn us and get us back where we should be.

And we may have to have discipline so severe that it amounts to being snapped out of the tree and piled up for burning. But we may recognize that we have strayed, that we've been faithless, that we've been operating according to the standards of the world and God can graft us in again. He can do it for Israel.

They are natural branches snapped out of the tree. But if they do not continue, notice this word continuing, we can continue in God's goodness or we can continue in unbelief, in faithlessness. If we continue in God's goodness, we'll keep receiving His goodness.

If we do not continue in unbelief, we can be grafted in. God is able to graft them in again. Verse 24, if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree? Now, these are people, what's the situation here? We get wrapped up thinking, well, what about Israel? What about Jewish believers? Are they Old Testament saints? Are they New Testament saints? Are they church age? What's going to be their inheritance in the eternal future and so forth? But stop and think, what are we talking about here in the book of

Romans? Paul is contrasting people who pursue righteousness by works, which in this case are the Jews who came out of a corrupted system like that and are trying to perpetuate it in the church.

He's contrasting it with those who recognize that righteousness comes by faith, just like Abraham in chapter 4. That it's trusting God, it's by faith that we stand, it's by faith that we bear fruit, it's by faith that we stay plugged into the tree. That's the contrast. Now, if we think about it today, are we thinking about Jews and Gentiles? Are we thinking about, well, what about the Messianic congregations versus us who are descended from Anglo-Saxons or whatever it might be? Is that the contrast? What's the principle for us today? Are we pursuing righteousness by what we do or righteousness by who we trust? That's the contrast and that's what we need to keep in mind.

If we have grown up in a Christian home and if we've been conditioned to go out and minister and have impact and we judge ourselves and others to be righteous by that, we've been snapped out of the tree because we're not operating in faith. We are *apisteia*, we are faithless. We're not operating out of faith, we're operating out of works.

Well, I know I'm going to heaven, but I better get busy here and get some things done or God's not going to be pleased with me. Righteousness by works and we've been snapped out. We're fruitless and we are destined for discipline.

We're destined to be piled up and the fruit of our life may be nothing but a cloud of smoke. But if we wake up, just like Paul says about these Jewish Christians, if we wake up and don't continue in no faith, God can graft us back into the tree of production. We can start to bear fruit at any point.

We can be grafted back in. If we grew up in a church, if we grew up in a synagogue, if we grew up in a church, if we grew up in a church that was not operating in some sort of a program-oriented faith, once we wake up and recognize what happens with faith, we're like these natural branches. We know the Bible stories.

We know the 66 books of the Bible. We can recite them backward and forward. We know the hymns.

We have the lyrics. We've heard for years many things in the Bible that we just weren't putting into practice. We've got a lot of resources.

What a wonderful thing it is, if we have been brought up in the faith and yet have been making this mistake, when we do latch on to faith, all of a sudden the things that were doing us no good can suddenly do us a lot of good. Our knowledge of the Scriptures, our knowledge of the promises, all the Scriptures we memorized but never really operated with faith, using, now those things are suddenly usable. When the Apostle Paul woke up and understood what was happening in the church age and recognized Jesus for who he was, all of that pharisaical learning

that was doing him no good and was worthless and was faithless suddenly came to bear.

He was a natural branch and now he was plugged back into the tree. If a wild olive branch that has no background and has no previous experience and no previous knowledge can be plugged into the tree and bear fruit, how much more a natural branch who is at home with those things and has been raised up and has grown out of those things to begin with. That's our opportunity as we live in this day and age.

Many of us come out of denominational Christianity and we were taught a lot of things in Sunday school. We learned a lot of songs. We memorized a lot of verses.

We've learned a lot of Bible stories and yet knowing all of those things, we may not necessarily have been operating in faith. We may not have really understood how righteousness works. But when we catch on to that, all of these things are useful and are resources.

We're like a natural branch being plugged back into the tree. Now the things that we learn can mean something and can do something. What's the point? I think sometimes when we come to understand the truth of the Scriptures, we look back at some of our earlier experiences and our earlier churches and our earlier pastors and we say, why didn't somebody teach me these things? Why didn't somebody wake me up and knock me on the head? And we kind of throw rocks at our earlier experiences or earlier churches or places where we may have been where we weren't operating out of faith.

But those things are part of what make us a natural branch. We've been believers for years perhaps and have missed out on the way the plan of God really works. But it's not time to look back and look down on that system or look down on those denominational churches or nitpick and talk about, well, look at all the legalism, look at the judging, look at the human energy, look at the misdirected energy that was a part of all of that worship.

When Paul is talking here in verse 18, do not boast against the branches, the branches that were snapped out of the tree. That applies to us today. We can look around in Christianity and we can see a lot of snapped off branches.

We can see a lot of denominations and a lot of churches and a lot of fellowships of believers that aren't bearing fruit because it's all righteousness by works, righteousness by impact, righteousness by scalps you can hang on your belt in terms of evangelism or whatever it might be. We can't sit around and boast over the branches that have been snapped off and say, well, hey, we're snapped off and I'm grafted in. Some of us may not have been a part of any of that.

We may have come straight to a strong teaching emphasis and not have spent years languishing in some of these churches. And we say, well, you know, I'm plugged right into the source. I've got my isagogical, categorical, exegetical teaching and I've got original languages and this, that and the other.

And I didn't get mired in the muck of all of this legalism and all of this human energy and misdirected focus and so forth. What is Paul saying here? How does this apply to us? We don't need to sit around and think in terms of, well, what about the Jews and what about the Gentiles? Think about natural branches and think about wild olive shoots. Some of us may have come directly in or some of us may now recognize that we have the opportunity to be plugged in and to bear fruit.

It's not the time to sit around looking at the other branches and say, well, I'm a fruitful branch and they're not. They're snapped off. They're going to be wood, hay and stubble at the judgment seat and spend our time boasting over the fallen branches.

We're not to do that. Paul says, do not boast against the branches. If you do boast, remember you don't support the root.

The root supports you. Understanding the Word of God and recognizing righteousness by faith, that didn't originate with us. That's something that came to us through the tree.

That's something that God has given us and that's what we need to focus on. What are we getting from the tree? Don't look around and say, well, I'm up here in the tree and you're down there on the ground and you're not bearing fruit and I am. That's wrong and we run the risk of being snapped out of the tree ourselves if we boast against the other branches.

That's not the point. In a lot of our groups that have recognized the importance of the Word of God and have focused on teaching, there's a lot of Christian bashing and brother bashing. We get around looking and we have sort of an implied sense of superiority.

When we get around other believers we say, oh, well, you poor ignorant slob. You haven't studied any original languages and you don't know the things that I know. You poor thing, you're just admired in legalism and so on.

That's a wrong attitude. That's not love. That's boasting against the branches.

He says, these branches that have been broken off and have been unfruitful, they were broken off because they didn't operate in faith. If you get busy looking at them, you may also be snapped off because you won't be operating in faith either. Do not boast against the branches.

Because of faithlessness, they were broken off. Not being unbelievers in the sense of no salvation, being faithless in the sense of not living the life, not walking the walk of faith that we're called to. If God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.

Consider the goodness and severity of God on those who fell severely but toward you goodness if you continue in His goodness. And our focus should be to continue in goodness. We are called to be a blessing to the body, not to be chopping off the parts of the body and judging the parts of the

body and throwing rocks at the other parts of the body.

They also, if they do not continue in unbelief, in faithlessness, will be grafted in for God is able to graft them in again. Why is God able to graft them in again? Because they are believers. They have been a part of that tree.

All of us at Salvation start out in the tree and it's only if we don't pursue the life of faith and the life of trust and righteousness by faith that God snaps us out. You can't be a branch unless you grew out of the tree, can you? Branches don't sort of materialize on the ground and then jump up into trees. The only reason there is a branch is because it grew out of a tree.

So they, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in. God is able to graft them in again. If you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree? We can look around us today and we see people who are involved in the charismatic movement.

We can see people who are involved in the Lordship Salvation movement. We can see people who are involved in the Experiencing God movement who want to look around and see where God is at work and join God in His work and are just focused on impact and on evangelism and so forth. We can see people who are involved in all different misunderstandings of what constitutes a life that pleases God.

Many of these are self-gratifying types of behavior. Many of these are motivated by the need to work off guilt or they are motivated by the need to impress other people or to be thought of as significant or to be seen as someone who had an impact and had significance and ministered to someone else. One of the greatest thrills that people get is to feel like they are looked up to and are respected and are appreciated by someone because they were able to make a difference.

Those are wonderful things and there is nothing wrong with that, but if that is our goal, if that is the reason we are doing things so that someone will appreciate us, we do err. We are not operating out of faith. Hopefully we are doing these things because we recognize who we are and why we are here in God's plan and that these things come out of faith.

We just have to watch ourselves. It is easy to slip into these things. Our nature deceives us.

We are deceptive hearts. Jeremiah 17.9, the heart is deceitful above all things. There is nothing as tricky as our own heart.

But any of us, all of us who think that we are branches that are bearing fruit, we all came from somewhere. We all came either from complete paganism or we came out of a denominational church or we came out of the touchy feely or the charismatic or whatever it might be. We have all come from somewhere and we were grafted into the tree at some point.

Any other believers that are currently engaged in some form of error, some form of faithlessness, have the opportunity to be grafted into the tree. We need to be alert and operate in love to be an encouragement for them to get grafted back into the tree, not a discouragement. Do you think that someone that we judge and that we look down on and that we disparage and that we criticize is going to be drawn to us and want to live the life that we live? They are not.

If someone does recognize that they are out of line and they recognize that they need to get straightened out with God, where are they going to turn? They are going to turn to someone who they see as living with love and joy and peace and patience and bearing that fruit that they now desire to bear. Judging and boasting over the branches, God will have to use someone else to steer them in the right direction. We won't be ready if we are boasting.

We'll be ourselves in danger of being snapped off. Let's pause here and take our break and when we come back we'll see if we can't move forward and perhaps conclude our study in Romans 11.