

THE CALLOUS ON ISRAEL'S HEART IS A WARNING TO OTHER NATIONS

ROMANS 11:17-24

Introduction

Men can harden their hearts against God. Men can become so callous against God that the conviction of the Holy Spirit is never felt. Hardness of heart can doom men to an eternity of separation from God. The callous on Israel's heart is a warning to all men everywhere, a warning to the nations of the world.

- I. A parable of the olive tree (v. 17).
- II. Warning 1: do not be arrogant (v. 18).
- III. Warning 2: fear complacency and unbelief (vv. 19-21).
- IV. Warning 3: take a sharp look at the kindness and sternness of God (v. 22).
- V. Warning 4: the restoration is a probable event (vv. 23-24).

I. *Romans 11:17 Israel vs. Gentiles*

This is a parable of the olive tree. The olive tree was the most useful, productive and valuable tree in Israel; therefore, it was precious to the economy and welfare of the nation. Because of this, the nation's relationship to God was sometimes pictured as an olive tree (see Psa. 52:8; Jer. 11:16; Hos. 14:6).

Now note the exact picture given. The natural branches refer to Israel, and the wild olive branches refer to Gentile believers. The olive tree refers to God and a right relationship with Him.

1. Some natural branches are broken off and rejected. Some Jews did not and do not believe in Christ; therefore, they are not attached to God. They do not have a right relationship with God. But note: only some of the branches were broken off. Some Jews did accept Christ as the Messiah and did maintain a right relationship with God.

Mat 21:43 *"Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit."*

Luke 14:24 *"I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet."*

Luke 20:16 *"He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When the people heard this, they said, "May this never be!"*

Rom 11:17 *If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root.*

Hosea 9:17 *My God will reject them because they have not obeyed him; they will be wanderers among the nations.*

2. Some wild olive branches were grafted into the tree. Note that the words “and you” (kai su) are singular. Paul is not speaking to Gentiles as a whole, but to the individual Gentile. Note two things.
 - a. The Gentile believer is said to have been a *wild olive branch*. The word “wild” means that the Gentile was not part of the olive tree (God); he was outside and estranged and alienated from the olive tree (God). Therefore, he was...
 - part of the wilderness and desert and uncultivated world
 - growing loose and uncontrolled
 - useless and worthless
 - uncared for and unprotected
 - insect-infested and sour and inferior
 - b. The Gentile believer is now said to have been grafted into the olive tree. He is now attached to God, that is, in a right relationship with God; therefore, he now partakes of the root and fatness of the olive tree. Very simply, this means that the believer is fed and nourished by God.

Thought 1. The glorious privilege of being nourished by God becomes as much the right of the Gentile as it is of the Jews.

Gen 22:18 *“And through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”*

Psa 22:27 *All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him.*

Psa 86:9 *All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name.*

Isa 9:2 *The people walking in darkness have seen a great light: on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.*

Isa 49:6 *He says: “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”*

Isa 60:3 *Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.*

Dan 7:14 *He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*

Acts 11:1 *The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.*

Hosea 2:23 *“I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called ‘Not my loved one.’ I will say to those called ‘Not my people,’ ‘You are my people’; and they will say, ‘You are my God.’”*

Acts 13:48 *When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.*

Acts 15:7 *After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe.”*

Acts 18:6 *But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”*

Acts 28:28 *“Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!”*

Rom 15:9 *So that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name.”*

Eph 3:6 *This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.*

Rev 11:15 *The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.”*

- c. Note the word “sharing.” The Gentile believer is grafted into the olive tree *to share with the natural branches*. This is important to note, for it means there is *only one* family of God, not two. Both the natural branches and the wild branches are part of the same olive tree. The only difference is that the natural branches were the first branches that grew on the olive tree. The wild branches had to be brought or grafted into the tree.

Thought 1. Note that some natural branches are broken off because they did not bear fruit.

John 15:6 *“If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.”*

II. **Romans 11:18** *Arrogance and Pride*

There is the first warning. The Gentile believer must not be arrogant and prideful over the Jews. The idea is that...

- we must not treat them as inferior beings because they deny Christ.

- we must not insult and ridicule them because they differ from us as Christian believers.
- we must not trample them underfoot because they refuse to believe and be like us.
- we must not boast that we know the truth about the Messiah and they do not.
- we must not glory in our knowledge of Christ, conveying the idea that we are better than the Jews.

The Gentile believer has no right to elevate himself over the Jews nor over anyone else. The reason is clearly seen. We were wild branches, very wild. We did not bear the root (Judaism); the root bore us (Christianity). If it had not been for Judaism, there would be no Christianity. If it had not been for Jewish believers, there would be no Christian believers. If Peter and Paul and the others had not surrendered their lives to preach Christ, then the message of Christ would have never reached us. We must never forget that “salvation is from the Jews” (Jn. 4:22).

Thought 1. Every Gentile believer owes a debt to Jewish people. We must carry the gospel to the Jews even as some of the earliest Christian Jews brought the gospel to us.

Rom 1:16 *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.*

Mat 28:19 *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*

Thought 2. All boasting and arrogance, pride and conceit against the Jews is wrong. It is wrong to elevate ourselves above others; in fact, it is even wrong to think that we are *better* or *higher* than anyone else.

Rom 12:3 *For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.*

Rom 12:16 *Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*

Phil 2:3-4 *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

Rom 2:19 *If you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark.*

James 4:10 *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

Prov 3:7 *Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil.*

Prov 16:8 *Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice.*

Isa 5:21 *Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight.*

III. *Romans 11:19–21 Fear Unbelief and Complacency*

There is the second warning. The Gentile believer must fear complacency and unbelief. (See Heb. 3:7-19.) There is the danger of Gentile believers thinking...

- that they are more *acceptable* to God because they have replaced the Jews as the true followers of God.
- that they are safe and secure in Christianity because Christianity is the religion that acknowledges God's Son.

However, we must always remember what this Scripture is saying. Israel was not rejected by God so that we, the Gentiles, might be saved. Israel was rejected by God because of unbelief. God did not and does not reject one people in order to save another people. God reaches out to every nation of people longing for all to be grafted into Him.

God accepts a person because the person believes in His Son Jesus Christ. The Jews did not believe; some Gentiles did believe. A Gentile believer stands attached to the olive tree by faith, not because of any goodness or merit or value within himself.

Now note: the Gentile believer must guard against complacency, against feeling safe and secure and more acceptable because he stands in Christianity, the religion that acknowledges God's Son. The Gentile believer must not be high-minded, but rather fear. He must fear, for God is less likely to spare the unnatural branches than He was the natural branches. The warning is strong: "He will not spare you either" (v. 21).

Thought 1. If God did not spare the Jews because of their unbelief, how much more will He not spare us. The Jews were the natural branches; we are the unnatural branches.

=> The Jews had the godly heritage; we had the wild, ungodly heritage.

=> The Jews had the fathers, the followers of the only living and true God; we had heathen, polytheistic fathers, fathers who created humanistic gods to suit their own fancies.

=> The Jews had the Word of God and the Saviour; we had neither.

=> the Jews had the prophets of God; we had the false humanistic priests of the world.

In light of this and of so much more depravity, we must guard against self-complacency and conceit. We must walk in the fear of God and humility, fearing unbelief lest we too be *broken off* (V. 17).

John 3:36 "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

John 8:24 "I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins."

Heb 3:12 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

Heb 4:11 *Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.*

1 Pet 1:17 *Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.*

Deu 10:12 *And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*

Isa 8:13 *The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread.*

IV. Romans 11:22 God's Goodness and Sternness

There is the third warning. The Gentile believer must take a sharp look at the kindness and severity or "sternness" of God.

1. The sternness of God is seen in the spiritual fall of Israel. The word "sternness" (apotomia) means abrupt, sharp, rough, cut off. The Jews had committed the very sins the Gentiles are being warned about in this passage. The Jews...
 - had developed an attitude of arrogance and boasting toward other people, refusing to carry the Word of God to them.
 - had felt high-minded and complacent, feeling safe and secure, thinking themselves to be more acceptable to God than other people.

In addition to these gross sins, the Jews had rejected God's prophets down through the centuries until they eventually killed God's very own Son. In one brief word, their sin was *unbelief*. The vast majority of the Jews never did believe God, not to the point that they loved God supremely. As a result, the judgment and sternness of God fell upon them (see Rom. 11:7-10).

Amos 3:2 *"You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins."*

Luke 12:47 *"That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows."*

John 15:6 *"If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned."*

Heb 10:29 *How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?*

Isa 13:11 *I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless.*

Rom 3:8-9 *Why not say — as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say — “Let us do evil that good may result”? Their condemnation is deserved. What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin.*

Jer 21:14 *I will punish you as your deeds deserve, declares the LORD. I will kindle a fire in your forests that will consume everything around you.*

Zep 1:12 *At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, ‘The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad.’*

2. The kindness of God is seen in the grafting in and acceptance of the Gentiles by God. But note the stress of this point: the kindness of God is given only to those who continue in God's kindness. A person who knows about the love of God must walk and live in God's kindness. The word “continue” (*epimeno*) means to remain, be steadfast, abide, persevere, endure. The idea is both *position* and *relationship*. The believer...
 - is positioned in the kindness of God.
 - is related to the kindness of God.

It is the picture of a person who is remaining and abiding in the house of God's kindness. A Gentile believer must continue and abide, endure and persevere in the kindness of God, or else he too will be cut off (*ekkopesei*) just as the Jews were cut off (v. 17).

Rom 2:4 *Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?*

John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

Rom 5:8 *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Eph 1:7 *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace [goodness].*

2 John 1:9 *Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.*

V. **Romans 11:23–24** *Restoration of Israel*

There is the fourth warning. The Gentile believer must know that Israel's restoration is a probable event.

1. The restoration of Israel is conditional. Note the word “if” — “if they do not persist in unbelief.” Genuine belief is the condition for salvation. A person has to run from his

unbelief to belief in order to be grafted in and accepted by God. No person comes to God unless he believes in His Son Jesus Christ.

John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

Acts 3:19 *Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.*

Jer 3:22 *“Return, faithless people; I will cure you of backsliding.” “Yes, we will come to you, for you are the LORD our God.”*

2. God is able to graft the Jews back into the olive tree. Two things are meant by this.
 - a. God is able because of His enormous love. God loves everyone and will forgive any person for any thing if that man will turn from his life of sin and unbelief. God will accept any person who approaches Him through His Son Jesus Christ.

Micah 7:18 *Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.*

Titus 3:4-7 *But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

- b. God is able because of His enormous knowledge and power. God is God; therefore, He has unlimited knowledge and power. He knows when a man's heart is subject to Him and moving toward Him. He knows just when to move upon a person's heart, and He can arrange circumstances that will cause the person to turn to Him. Therefore, when the time comes, He has the power to stir Jewish hearts to turn to Him in large numbers. The valley of dry bones can be resurrected by the power of God (Ezk. 37: 1f).

Rom 16:25 *Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past.*

Luke 1:37 *“For nothing is impossible with God.”*

Eph 1:18-20 *I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, And his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.*

Eph 2:1 *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.*

1 Chr 29:12 *Wealth and honour come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all.*

3. The grafting in of the natural branches (the Jews) is much more likely than the calling of the Gentiles was. Note the words “much more.” Paul is confident that God is not only able, but God will graft the Jews back into the olive tree. Paul proclaims that the Jews will turn to Christ and be restored into a right relationship with God (see Rom. 11:16).

Rom 9:27 *Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved.”*

Rom 11:5 *So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.*

Rom 11:25-26 *I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.”*

Deu 30:3 *Then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you.*

Isa 1:9 *Unless the LORD Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah.*

Jer 23:3 *“I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number.”*

Jer 24:6-7 *My eyes will watch over them for their good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them. I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.*

Jer 31:7-8 *This is what the LORD says: “Sing with joy for Jacob; shout for the foremost of the nations. Make your praises heard, and say, ‘O Lord, save your people, the remnant of Israel.’ See, I will bring them from the land of the north and gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them will be the blind and the lame, expectant mothers and women in labour; a great throng will return.”*

Ezek 14:22 *Yet there will be some survivors — sons and daughters who will be brought out of it. They will come to you, and when you see their conduct and their actions, you will be consoled regarding the disaster I have brought upon Jerusalem — every disaster I have brought upon it.*

Ezek 37:10 *So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet — a vast army.*

Micah 2:12 *“I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people.” ■*