

Be What You Are

Romans 11: 16

- In chapter 11, Paul wants the non-Jewish Christians in the church in Rome to understand that God has not given up on his ancient people, the Jews; neither has Paul; and neither should they. Look again at the structure of Romans 11.
 - **11: 1** Has God Rejected His People?
 - **11: 1 – 10** No! God is at work saving a remnant.
 - ♦ **11: 11 - 12** God is working to bring salvation to Gentile and Jew alike: Israel has stumbled but they haven't fallen. God has used the Jewish stumble to bring the blessing of salvation to the Gentiles, which God will then use to incite Israel to jealousy and thereby bring revival to Israel, which will bring great blessing to Jew and Gentile alike.
 - **11: 13 – 15** Paul is joining God in this work by magnifying his ministry to the Gentiles to bring life from the dead
 - ♦ **11: 16 – 24** God is working to bring salvation to Gentile and Jew alike: The imagery of a holy olive tree which represents the people of God comprised of natural branches (faithful Jews from both the Old and New Testament time periods); broken off, unfaithful Jewish branches; grafted in Gentile branches; and a future grafting in of previously broken off Jewish branches.
 - **11: 25 – 32** God is at work bringing salvation to all of Israel
 - **11: 33 – 37** A hymn of praise (doxology) to the work of God in salvation
- So, think what we see in this structure. Chapter 11 starts with a question about what God is doing and after Paul works through all that God is doing, it ends with praise for what God is doing, and in between the question and the praise is the explanation of how God is at work saving Jew and Gentile alike.
 - But look at what Paul focuses on in the center. It is how he is joining God in his work, by seeking to magnify his ministry, as an apostle to the Gentiles.
 - Let me remind you what it looks like to magnify ministry by simply quoting one line from last week.
 - ♦ The whole duty of the Christian can be summed up in this: feel, think, and act in a way that will make Christ look as great as he really is. Be a telescope for the world to look through and see the infinite stary wealth of the glory of the unsearchable riches of Christ.
 - Are we doing that, in our own individual lives? Are we doing that as a church? Are we creating a community that is the fulfillment of what God had called us to be? Would a pagan Gentile, or a devout Jew look at our lives, look at our church and be aroused to envy, and, as a result, give the gospel a hearing?
 - Today, as we look at verse 16, what I would like to talk about in more detail is how do we become that telescope that magnifies the infinite stary wealth of the unsearchable riches of Christ? What kind of life do we need to live that will arouse envy in others to desire the kind of life that we have?

Romans 11: 16 If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

- What is Paul talking about? How does that verse point us to being a telescope that magnifies Christ to the world around us?
 - To see that, we have to understand Paul's illustrative analogy, but to do that we first have to understand what the word holy really means. Once we understand those two things then we can talk about the application to Israel and to us. Once we do all of that, I think we will see clearly how to live life in a way that magnifies ministry and Christ to those around us.

1. What it means to be holy

- If you were to ask a person today to describe the attributes of God, the vast majority would start with love. Love certainly is an attribute of God, and our culture loves the idea of a loving God, because in their minds that means they can live however they want to live, and God will still love them.
 - This is why decadence has filled the world we live in. There is no fear of God because God is love and nothing else. But is that true?
 - Think of the vision of God that Isaiah had:

Isaiah 6: 1 – 3 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ²Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

- The angels weren't singing love, love, love. They were singing and worshipping God crying out to one another holy, holy, holy.
- When we speak about God being holy, most people think that this means that God does not sin. That everything he does is right. Those things are both true. And both are involved in the matter of God being holy. But they are not really what holiness is about.
- What holiness really means is that God is set apart from us. That is, he's not like us. He is over and above and utterly beyond us, so we cannot even begin to imagine what he's like except to the extent that he reveals himself to us.
- Holiness is not just an attribute of God, it is the adjective that describes all of God's attributes, and therefore describes God. Everything about God is holy.
- Holiness is God being set apart from us in all of His perfections.
 - But there in lies our problem with understanding the word holiness. Our finite minds cannot fully comprehend an infinite God, so therefore we cannot fully comprehend all that holiness is.
 - But for now, it is enough for us to see this; isn't it? God is different from us. He is set apart from us.
- The word holy is used over 600 times in the Bible, and not just in reference to God. It is also used in reference to objects, such as: holy ground, holy Sabbath, holy nation, holy anointing oil, holy linen coat, holy jubilee, holy house, holy field,

holy tithe, holy water, holy sensors, holy ark, holy bread, holy city, holy seed, holy word, holy covenant, holy ones, the holy place, and the Holy of Holies.

- But how can inanimate objects, objects incapable of any kind of action, be holy?
 - Well, it is the same idea as with God. God is holy because He is set apart from us, and everything else for that matter. An object becomes holy when it is set apart for God's use rather than a common use.
 - The Sabbath is holy because it is set apart to God. When we profane the Sabbath, by engaging in the common, treating it as any other day, like the world does, then we profane it.
 - In the same way, the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle was holy because the Tabernacle was set apart from the rest of the camp of Israel, as the place Israel could meet with God. And the Holy of Holies was set apart from the rest of the Tabernacle as the dwelling place of God. Ordinary bread, oil, pots, became holy when they were set apart in service to God.
 - But the Bible doesn't just use the word holy to describe God and objects devoted to God, it also uses the word holy to describe people, even sinful people, like us. For example:

Deuteronomy 7: 6 "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

- Now, a person doesn't have to be an Old Testament Scholar to know that Israel under Moses frequently behaved in a manner that could be described as anything but holy. How can sinful people be holy? The same way. They are set apart for God.
- Israel was holy, not because they were sinless, but because God had set them apart as His treasured possession. So, when did this happen with Israel? It was when God chose Abraham.

Deuteronomy 10: 15 the Lord set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day.

- ♦ Who were Israel's fathers? Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God chose them, Abraham specifically, and set them apart as holy to him.
- And now that brings us to Paul's analogy of the root and the lump of dough.

Romans 11: 16 If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

2. Explaining Paul's analogy

- The second analogy that Paul uses is the easiest one, so let's start with that. If the root is holy, so are the branches.
 - If I plant the rootstock of an apple tree, what kind of tree will I grow? What will its branches be? An apple tree.
 - If I plant the root stock of a Black Hills Spruce, what kind of tree will I grow? What will its branches be? A Black Hills Spruce.
 - If I plant a holy rootstock, what kind of tree will grow from that? What will its branches be? Just like apple rootstock produces an apple tree and Black Hills

Spruce rootstock produces a Black Hills Spruce, holy rootstock will produce a holy tree with holy branches.

- Now with that in mind, let's think through the first analogy. "It the dough offered as firstfruits is holy so is the whole lump." What on earth? Well, to figure out what on earth we have to start by understanding firstfruits.
 - There are many different instances in the Old Testament when God tells Israel to make an offering of the firstfruits. The first is in:

Exodus 23: 19 The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God.

- To obey this command from God was an act of faith that showed trust in God. Think what happens if you give God the firstfruits and then the harvest fails. You would go hungry. But giving God the first fruits didn't just demonstrate faith. It also demonstrated a recognition that the harvest was actually all God's. It was holy to Him. Whatever you were growing came from the hand of God, and therefore belonged to God.
 - ♦ The quick application is this: God doesn't want leftovers. God want's the first cut, because all that we are, all that we have is His.
 - Whether it is a monetary offering, or our time, or really anything else, God doesn't want what we have leftover at the end of a day, week, or month. As God's people we give our time, talent, and treasure to God first, because it is all from, for, and to God. Holy to God. It's all His to do as He pleases with, not ours to do, as we please with. Giving to God the firstfruits is both a recognition that all that we have belongs to God, and an act of faith that we are trusting God.

Numbers 15: 17 – 21 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁸ "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land to which I bring you ¹⁹ and when you eat of the bread of the land, you shall present a contribution to the Lord. ²⁰ Of the first of your dough you shall present a loaf as a contribution; like a contribution from the threshing floor, so shall you present it. ²¹ Some of the first of your dough you shall give to the Lord as a contribution throughout your generations.

- Now think about a big batch of dough. Pumpernickel is a bread you can get at a Jewish deli in New York, but it probably wasn't the dough that ancient Israel would have been making with the grains they harvested in the Promised Land. But I like saying Pumpernickel, so let's use it for an example.
 - If I have a huge batch of pumpernickel dough and I make a loaf of bread from it, is it possible that the rest of the batch of dough would make white bread rather than pumpernickel? Of course not. Every loaf that I make from that batch of dough from the firstfruit to the last crumb will be the same kind of bread.
 - So, now let's take this back to Paul's illustration. When Israel took the first of the grain harvest and made a batch of dough, the first loaf from that dough was given to God, and therefore was holy, and, if the first part of a batch of dough is holy, then the whole batch is holy.



- A holy root will always make holy branches, and a holy lump of dough will always make holy loaves of bread.
 - In fact, interestingly enough, listen to how Paul extends this argument to our spouse and children in:

1 Corinthians 7: 12 – 15 if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. 13 If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

- How on earth can this be? I know lots of holy spouses who are married to unholy terrors, and I know lots of holy parents who have children who are unholy terrors.
- Well to understand how something can be holy in spite of all appearances to the contrary, we have to understand two things.
 - First what Paul has taught us in this point about firstfruits, and it is this: if part of something is holy then the whole thing is holy. If the root is holy, the tree and branches are holy. If the dough is holy, then all of the loaves made from the dough are holy, if part of the family is holy, then the family is holy.
 - And second, holiness doesn't mean sinless, or even saved, it simply means set apart to God. This is part of the reason we baptize the children of believers. To mark them out as being set apart for God, and our hope in doing that is that being set apart for God they will grow up knowing the Lord, loving the Lord, and desiring to live in holiness before Him. We do this knowing that for that happen in their life, God must be the one who will:

Ezekiel 36: 25 sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

- Now let's put this all together with what Paul is trying to teach us here.

Romans 11: 16 If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

- In the context of Romans 11, Paul is speaking of the Jews. Who were the firstfruits of the lump of dough? Who was the root? The patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These men were set apart by God, therefore they were holy simply because God chose them out of all of the peoples of the world. Because the firstfruits, the root, were holy to God, all of Israel that descended from them were also holy—a people belonging to God.
- The point that Paul wants to make here is that even though Israel has been rebellious throughout its history, even though they have rejected the Messiah, they are still holy to God.

3. The application for Israel

- God designated Israel to be holy and then called them to live out what He had designated them to be.

Leviticus 11:44 For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy.

- To consecrate yourself is to seek to live out the holiness, the set apartness, that God has declared over you.
 - But it is clear from Old Testament history, the Gospels, the book of Acts, and what we observe even today, that much of Israel has not done that. Instead, they have rejected the Law of God, the prophets, the Messiah, and have persecuted the church. They have not and do not live as a people set apart for God. But that doesn't change the fact that they are. If the root is holy, the branches are holy. Because of Abraham and God's promise to Abraham, Israel still is holy (set apart) to the Lord.
- The point Paul wants us to see is that God is not done with Israel yet. They remain God's chosen people, a people set apart for God. And even in their rebellion, they are fulfilling God's purpose. Remember what Paul told us in:

Romans 11: 11 through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles.

- Remember, It was the Jews rejection of the Gospel in the book of Acts that caused and allowed the Gospel to spread like wildfire throughout the Gentiles living in the Roman Empire.
 - In God's holy sovereignty, God is using even the stumble of His holy people to accomplish His purpose. Israel was holy to God, and was being used by God, but in their rebellion, they were missing out on God's salvation.
- But, as we have already seen and will continue to see, here in chapter 11, God is not yet done with the people of Israel.

Romans 11: 25 – 26 a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And in this way all Israel will be saved.

- Just as salvation has come, through Christ, to the Gentiles, and made them holy to the Lord, a day is coming in which Israel, the people made holy, through God's call of Abraham, will be completed in holiness by Christ.
 - God will finish what He has started. He has declared Israel to be holy to Him and He will make Israel holy to Him by the power of His Holy Spirit bringing Israel to repentance and faith in Christ, making them holy to the Lord.

4. What this means for us

- As we think about holiness, whether it is in reference to God, or objects , or people, the idea of being holy means to be set apart.
 - With God, holiness is part of the very state of His being. He can't be anything other than holy in all of his actions.
 - But that is not true with objects and especially people. With objects and people, holiness isn't a natural state of being, but rather, a result of a declaration made by God that the objects and the people are set apart for service to God. And it is possible, at least in the short run for objects and humans to be set apart as holy, by God's declaration, and yet be misused in sinful ways.

- Think of the Sabbath for example:

Exodus 16: 23 “This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord.’”

- The Sabbath was holy because God designated it to be holy. But then think of the 4th commandment.

Exodus 20:8 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”

- When it comes to the Sabbath or any other object, there is an action that goes with the designation. The object must be kept holy by only being used for holy purposes. Hmmm, is there an application here for us?
- When something was made holy to the Lord, that is set apart to the Lord, it was never to be profaned through common use. In other words, once it was set apart for use by God, it was God’s and therefore not to be used for any secular or worldly purpose.
- The same is true with people. Those who have been set apart for God as holy to God are to live that way.
- Think of Israel’s primary sin in the Old Testament. God declared them to be holy and called them to live in holiness—to be different from the nations around them, but instead what did Israel do? They constantly sought to be like the nations around them. They didn’t want to be different. They wanted to be the same.
 - All of Israel was holy to the Lord, but not all of Israel lived out what God declared them to be.
 - Now we can see by observation that this is true. The Old Testament is filled with accounts of people who lived in holiness, that is lived a life that was set apart for God: Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Deborah, Boaz, Samuel, David, Elijah to name but a few.
 - But it is also filled with accounts of people who, although they were designated, and even marked with circumcision, as being part of God’s holy people, they lived in a very unholy way: Korah, the whole first generation of Israelites who turned away from the conquest of the Promised Land, Achan, Saul to name but a few.
 - All were from Abraham’s root, all were holy to the Lord, but only some lived out what God had designated them to be.
- Now, think again of Paul’s illustration of the olive tree in the verses that follow, and let’s see how this applies to us.

Romans 11: 16 – 20 if the root is holy, so are the branches. 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, 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. 19 Then you will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” 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.

- All the branches on the tree were holy, but some were broken off. Why? Unbelief—a lack of faith—a failure to strive to live out the holiness that God declared was theirs.

- Both the first generation of Israel, that turned away from the Promised Land, in fear, and Joshua who later led the conquest of the Promised Land, were holy to the Lord. But that first generation was broken off of the tree because of their unfaithfulness, while Joshua remained part of the tree through faith.

- Faith and holiness go hand in hand. Listen to how the writer of Hebrews puts faith and holiness together.

Hebrews 12:14 Strive for...holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

Hebrews 11: 6 without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

- Now think what those two verses tell us. To see the Lord and draw near to the Lord requires both holiness and faith. Faith is what allows a person to live out a life of set apartness, or holiness.
 - It is faith that allows us to come to the cross, repent of our sin and be cleansed of all of our unrighteousness. It is faith that allows us to take up our cross and follow Jesus and be perfected in holiness. The more closely we follow Jesus the more separated we will be from the world.
 - ♦ Just as Jesus prayed in:

John 17: 15 – 19 I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

- Jesus is praying for God to sanctify us through his death. Do you know what the word sanctify means? To be made holy. Through Christ we become what God has declared us to be. We are in the world, but not of the world, because we are holy, set apart, and day by day we are being sanctified, further set apart by the renewing grace of Christ if we continue in faith. This is how we magnify ministry. We stand out from the world, by living lives set apart for God.
- Don't be taken in by the world's siren song to come and be like them.

1 Corinthians 6: 9 – 11 do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

- Why did God do all of that for you? So, like Old Testament Israel, you could be holy to God, set apart to live as light in a dark, depraved world.

1 Peter 2: 9 (In Christ) you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.