

**I'VE FALLEN BUT I CAN GET UP  
ROMANS 11:11-24**

**By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn**

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## **I'VE FALLEN BUT I CAN GET UP ROMANS 11:11-24**

**By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn**

I know this is a very difficult section in the book of Romans because it deals with how God chooses people, which from a human perspective seems totally arbitrary and final. It seems that humans have no say in the decision making process of God since all humans are sinners and in our natural states, alienated from God.

On the other hand, even though we are predestined, the Bible seems with equal force to insist that we are free-willed human beings, and our decisions do count for a great deal.

To try and reconcile these two truths often lead us to dead ends, or force us to make one of these truths dominant at the expense of the other. I have said from the beginning of chapter 9 that I think what Paul is doing in these chapters is leveling the playing field between the Jewish and Gentile believers in the church at Rome. The Jewish Christians would seem to have the privileged status because Christianity is basically a Jewish movement. Jesus becomes the fulfillment of all Jewish prophecy and history. The Jews were God's Chosen People.

But, as we have seen in these chapters, the Jewish religious and political leaders had rejected Christ, with the majority of national Israel following their lead. Even though a significant number of Jews received salvation and chose to follow Jesus, the Church grew more rapidly among the Gentile people.

Paul's intent in this section is to remind both parties, Jew and Gentile, that it was only by God's grace and providence that they have been saved. They all entered the kingdom of God the same way, by grace through faith.

In trying to make this passage relevant to our situation here at Devon Church, I emphasized the fact that the church at Rome was much like ours; it was a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, diverse church as is ours. Paul has broken down all distinctions that divide people. Since we all came to Christ the same way, race, gender, socio-economic status, nothing else makes a difference. There is neither male nor female, Greek nor Jew, free nor slave in Christ Jesus. We all got here the same way ... by grace through faith.

This morning, I would like us to apply these principles to our multi-ethnic setting. However, I want to focus on the original setting of this passage, because I think it will remind us that we are related to Jewish people and that there is absolutely no room for anti-Semitic behavior on the part of Christians.

Arrogance is the attitude that leads to prejudice. And arrogance is usually what causes us to stumble and fall. At least I know that's the case with me.

At home, everybody tries to convince me that I'm not always right. My mother, aunt, wife and kids say, "Look, you can't always be right." I know that's hard for all of you to believe, as it is for me.

One day, Luig and I were in an airport, and I stepped on one of those fortune-telling scales. I dropped in a coin, and out came a little fortune-telling card. It read, "You are a born leader, with superior intelligence, quick wit and charming manner, magnetic personality and attractive to the opposite sex." I handed it to Luig and said, "Read that!" She did, and then she turned the card over and said, "It has your weight wrong too."

It seems that arrogance is what causes us to fall, but unlike that commercial that says, “Help me. I’ve fallen and I can’t get up,” we can get up ... if we are willing to humble ourselves.

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We must remember that the key characteristic that allows a diverse church to flourish without conflict is humility. If we listen to God and to one another humbly, we will enjoy incredible success as a church. We must continually carry a special love for the Jews and Israel, because we are kind of after thoughts in this whole salvation history.

I. RICOCHET BLESSINGS (Vs. 11-15)  
**WE MUST ALWAYS KEEP IN MIND THAT WE ARE ONLY SAVED BECAUSE OF GRACE.**

Keep an eye on how this passage is put together. It’s like some of those cartoons where a character will shoot a bullet and it will ricochet all over the place and then will hit its target. Verses 11-15 describe this ‘ricochet blessing’ phenomena; and as we examine this event: **WE MUST ALWAYS KEEP IN MIND THAT WE ARE ONLY SAVED BECAUSE OF GRACE.**

Now keep in mind, because the Jews are God’s chosen people, there are only two categories of people in the world, Jews and non-Jews. The non-Jews are called Gentiles. That means that every Nation, ethnicity, race, and culture in the world, except Jews, is considered to be Gentile. Most of us here today are Gentile believers. To my knowledge we only have one Jewish believer in our church.

That’s the way the church in Rome was going. There were more and more Gentile believers. The Jewish believers were in the minority. So Paul, a Jew himself was wondering out loud, “What happened to God’s chosen people, the Jews?” In verse 1 of

chapter 11 he asked, “Does the fact that national Israel rejected Jesus mean that God rejected Israel?” Paul answered that question with a resounding No. Last time we explained that God had still chosen a small portion of the Jews to believe, we called this the remnant.

A. IN BOTH SUCCESS AND FAILURE (Vs. 11-12)

Verses 11-12 describe this ‘ricochet blessing’ in both successes and failures. In verse 11 Paul asks the next logical question; in speaking of the Jews he says, “Well did they stumble and fall beyond recovery?” Again he answers, “No!” The picture Paul paints is that in rejecting Jesus, Israel had stumbled. They are at the edge of a cliff, waving their hands, trying to maintain their balance, and it looks as if they are about to teeter over the edge, but God’s miraculous hand reaches out, grabs hold of them, and pulls them back.

God’s purpose is demonstrated throughout these verses; look how the community is to be a blessing to one another. Look at the Ping-Pong effect here. Because of Israel’s rejection of the Messiah, salvation and a restored relationship with God was offered to the Gentiles. It almost seems if the Jews had received Jesus, then the rest of the world may never have had an opportunity to be saved.

Now that Gentiles have become God’s chosen people, God’s hope is that Israel will become jealous of this and they will come back to God.

Paul continues, if Gentiles were so incredibly blessed because of Israel’s sin, how much more will the Gentiles be blessed when Israel comes back into the fold?

I will talk more about this later, but we as Gentiles have inherited a great salvation history from the Jews. They are our spiritual ancestors. It is shameful that most

Christians don't read and study the Old Testament. That is our heritage. If we have been blessed so incredibly as a church with only a few Jewish believers among us, imagine how wide open the flood gates of God's blessings will be when the majority of His chosen people, the Jews, come to the church as believers in Jesus.

B. IN MINISTRY (Vs. 13-14)

Verses 13-14 describe the 'ricochet blessings' in ministry. Paul has addressed the Jews in the church at Rome and told them to be humble for two reasons: first, they were only a remnant. They were a minority in a quickly growing Gentile movement. Second, they were not saved because they were good, or righteous, or holy; they were saved by grace through faith. In reality, they were just as sinful and dirty and alienated from God as any Gentile.

Now in verse 13 Paul says, "I'm now talking to you Gentiles." Paul was the apostle that Jesus personally commissioned to preach to non-Jews. This had to be traumatic for Paul since he was a hard core Jew, religiously, politically, and culturally. Paul was a Jew through and through. He had a real love for his people and ached for their salvation. Historically, Paul is the apostle who brought the word of salvation to the Gentile people throughout the Roman Empire.

But look at what he says to these Gentile Christians in Rome, "I take my ministry to you Gentiles very seriously. I want you all to become Christians." But then look at what he adds, "But I have ulterior motives as well. I am preaching with all this zeal in the hopes that when the Jewish people, my flesh and blood, see the incredible work God is doing among you, they will become jealous and want to reclaim their chosen people status. My hope is that some of them will give their lives to Christ."

When Paul went to cities to preach, he always looked for synagogues and the Jewish people first. At the beginning of this letter to the Romans he said the Gospel was for the Jew first and then for the Gentile. Paul is willing to give all he has to his ministry to Gentiles, but his first love is for his own flesh and blood, the Jews.

I also want to remind us that it seems Paul's ministry coincides with the heart of God. When we see Paul's heart, we in essence see God's heart. God's first love is for the Jews as well.

Paul is kind of saying to the Gentile believers, that includes most of us, "Don't be too proud and don't ever get arrogant about your salvation because in reality, you are all Johnny-come-lately's.

#### C. IN THE END (V. 15)

In verse 15 it seems that Paul is laying the ground-work for God's again picking up Israel and working with her to become yet another occasion for a 'ricochet blessing.' Commentators stumble all over this verse and they come up with all kinds of explanations. I would rather say that I can't begin to imagine what this means. Here is Paul's argument: if the rest of the world was so incredibly blessed because of Israel's rejection of the Messiah, imagine what kind of blessings the world will experience when Israel accepts Jesus as the Christ.

I don't want you to miss this: You and I have received Jesus because the nation of Israel rejected Jesus. Do we realize what an incredible blessing salvation is? I was alienated from God. You were alienated from God. We were objects of God's wrath, headed for an eternity in hell. When we received Jesus, we were changed in an instant.

We became objects of God's love, we were reconciled with God and our eternities are secure in heaven with Jesus.

I can't imagine anything more incredible than that. Yet Paul says when the Jews, as a nation, come to recognize Jesus as the Promised Messiah, we will experience even more incredible blessings; the magnitude will be as great as the difference between life and death.

Do you think we owe an ongoing debt of gratitude to the Jews? Do you think we should consistently pray for their salvation? I know that at Devon Church we have made a commitment to this ministry, where we have Jews for Jesus and Chosen People ministries come and share this ministry with us every year. So Paul reminds all of us believers, Jew and Gentile, that none of us deserve salvation: **WE MUST ALWAYS KEEP IN MIND THAT WE ARE ONLY SAVED BECAUSE OF GOD'S GRACE.** That's what all of us have in common. If we remember that, then all the other things that could possibly divide us like race, gender, economic status, and culture, all mean absolutely nothing in the kingdom of God.

## II. UNNATURAL BLESSINGS (Vs. 16-22) **WE MUST BE CAREFUL TO NEVER BECOME ARROGANT.**

Which brings us to the unnatural blessings described in verses 16-22? These verses contain a strong warning: **WE MUST BE CAREFUL NEVER TO BECOME ARROGANT.**

### A. THE PRINCIPLE OF HOLINESS (V. 16)

Verse 16 describes the principle of holiness. Again, in these verses, the commentators try to nail down and explain every aspect of the metaphors used. I think

that may be productive for some, but it has caused others to ridicule Paul for his lack of horticultural understanding.

Since I'm not too smart, I want to point out the obvious and let the rest go. Commentators have identified the first fruits and the holy root of the tree with the Jewish Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Others have identified the first fruits and holy root with Jesus and some have identified them with the early Jewish Christians.

Here's Paul's principle of holiness. Holiness always travels from God to us, never from us to God, as when the Hebrews brought the first part of their harvest and dedicated it to God, it was God Who made that portion and the rest of the harvest holy.

In the metaphor of the tree, the point is that the root is what makes the branches holy, not the branches that make the root holy. A good visual is when in John 15, Jesus says, "I am the vine (the root) you are the branches. If you remain in me, if you cling to me, you will produce much fruit." Now that may seem obvious ... but that is not a very popular concept in our culture. In our culture, people want to define right and wrong for themselves. They make the rules for their lives, and then they try and conjure up a god that fits their ideas of what god should be. Some people say, "I could never worship the Christian God."

Even Christians have picked up this attitude. Most of us don't really want to hear God's will for our lives. We would rather tell God what our will is, and call on Him to make it happen.

We often ignore the plain commands of Scripture; in fact, I'm guessing most Christians don't even read or study their Bibles, yet somehow we have come to think we are good.

Here is a good reminder; holiness flows downwards, from God onto us, not upwards from us to God. I think the people in the church at Rome had to stop, look each other in the eye, and realize that none of them had any right to be there. It was only by the grace of God that any of them had found salvation in Jesus. For the Jewish believers, the odds were against them becoming Christians. Their leaders and the majority of the people rejected Jesus. For the Gentile believers, it would have been a long shot that the Jews would reject Jesus and God would then offer them salvation and from their perverted backgrounds, it was a long shot that they would want to receive the Gospel message.

The truth we must realize here among our diverse crowd is that it was truly a long shot that any of us received Christ. None of us are good. You don't think so? Would any of you feel comfortable if God were to show your life, every act you did in secret, and your every thought, and project it up here on the screen for all of us to see? Do you think you would be proud of that? I know that I would never want that to happen. Let's, once again, reaffirm what Paul said earlier in Romans, "There is none that is righteous ... no not one." Not you, not me." When we look each other in the eye, we must realize that none of us belong here. We are all here simply by the grace of God.

#### B. THE SOURCE OF HOLINESS (Vs. 17-21)

Verses 17-21 remind us of the source of holiness. Here is Paul's point; there were wild olive trees, and cultivated olive trees. Obviously the cultivated olive trees produced better fruit because they were tended to and cared for year after year. Often in the Old Testament, Israel is referred to as an olive tree. Paul, still addressing the Gentiles in Rome said, "Look, its true! God cut of many of the natural branches from this cultivated

tree to make room for you, and even though you have no business as a wild branch being a part of this cultivated tree, God, by grace, grafted you to become part of this cultivated tree.”

Paul makes several points here. First, the natural branches that were cut off to make room for the wild branches were cut off because of their unbelief; God did not just cut them off to make room for the Gentiles. Second, there was nothing good about the wild branches. In fact, they were by nature inferior. It was only by faith that they were grafted in. Third, these wild branches offer nothing to the tree; it is the tree that gives to them.

I hope we can see what the reality of our salvation is: We are all wild, useless, bitter, substandard branches. We have absolutely nothing to offer. It is by grace that God chooses to graft us into this salvation tree where we will draw nourishment for it.

And here is the great warning to us as Christians. Paul says, be careful never to get arrogant or even begin to think you are good. Why? Because if God cut off the natural branches, He won't hesitate to cut us out as well, since we are alien to this tree. It is only this realistic, humble view of ourselves that will allow us to remain part of the tree.

#### C. THE WAY OF HOLINESS (V. 22)

Look at verse 22. It describes the way of holiness. Paul encourages us to maintain a balanced view of who God is. We are to consider His kindness and His sternness. We are to consider His holiness and His love. God is holy. He will not tolerate us making up our own rules for living. If ever we come to the place where we think we are even the least little bit good, we better be careful because if we put ourselves

up against God's holiness, we will fall short and that will make us eligible to experience His sternness.

Those who are judgmental or prejudiced better be filled with fear because that attitude fails to take into account that we are all undeserving and that we are all saved the same way, by grace through faith.

On the other hand, fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. It does us good to meditate on how big, powerful, how holy God is, and how angry He can become. It doesn't take much time in that type of meditation to realize how lost we really are. It doesn't take long to come to the conclusion that if there is no grace, then we are eternally doomed. That kind of humility on our part makes us candidates to continue to receive God's kindness. That kind of humility enables us to love one another.

I want to point out the obvious here; Paul says that if any group looks down on the other; that is arrogance and that is spiritual pride. That will only bring God's sternness and His wrath. If the Gentiles start to nurture prejudice towards the Jews, God will take a stand against them.

For us in a multi-ethnic, socially and economically diverse church, any form of prejudice is nothing less than spiritual arrogance and a failure to realize what salvation by grace through faith means. Pride and arrogance puts us in a position to be objects of God's wrath.

Humility puts us in a position to be recipients of God's kindness. Humility puts us in a position to love one another. Since humility is the personality trait that should characterize the people of God: **WE MUST BE CAREFUL NEVER TO BECOME ARROGANT.**

III. NATURAL BLESSINGS (Vs. 23-24)  
**GOD'S BLESSINGS COME TO THE HUMBLE.**

To reinforce this concept, Paul describes natural blessings in verses 23-24. The message here is that: **GOD'S BLESSINGS COME TO THE HUMBLE.** At the beginning of the sermon I alluded to the commercial where a person had fallen. He cried out, "Help me I've fallen and I can't get up."

A. GOD IS WILLING AND ABLE (V. 23)

Well the truth is that all of us have fallen, but as verse 23 points out, God is both willing and able to pick us up. The truth is we can get up. The procedure for everyone is exactly the same and it doesn't matter if we are rich or poor, if we are educated or uneducated and it doesn't matter what race or ethnicity we are. We all get up, by faith. If we persist in self-righteousness, pride, and arrogance, we will remain crippled. We can only stand up and walk by admitting that there is nothing good in us, and then placing our faith and trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

B. HIS PEOPLE ARE ABLE. BUT WILLING? (V. 24)

Salvation is right there for all of us. It's there for the taking. As verse 24 points out, the question is not whether God is willing and able, the question is this: God's people are able to stand by faith. But are they willing? The point to the church at Rome is clear. God is going to one day work with Israel again. The fact that there is a remnant of Jewish believers and the fact that Israel has not stumbled beyond recovery indicates that God is not finished with His chosen people. And if God could bring us Gentiles to salvation, how much easier will it be for Him to bring in His chosen people, the ones He designed salvation for in the first place?

Look, this is not difficult, and it's not brain surgery, pride and arrogance put us in direct conflict with God. Humility and faith puts us in a right relationship with God:

**GOD'S BLESSINGS COME TO THE HUMBLE.**

Paul has leveled the playing field in the church at Rome. There was no room for prejudice, pride, arrogance, or power struggles. What Paul is doing in these chapters is building the foundation for the community. This community is to be characterized by love, humility, and unity: **IT IS ALWAYS A GOOD REMINDER TO REMEMBER**

**THAT GOD OPPOSES THE PROUD BUT LIFTS UP THE HUMBLE.**

I don't know how many of you read Aesop's Fables, but they have some great lessons. This one teaches just how stupid it is to be proud and arrogant.

**Two ducks were preparing for their annual flight south for the winter, when their friend Mr. Frog informed them of his desire to travel along. "You have no wings," said the ducks. "No," said Mr. Frog, "but if you two ducks will kindly hold this stick in your mouths, I'll grasp it in the middle with my mouth, and we'll all go along together."**

**The plan was working out quite well but, as they flew over a pasture, two cows looked up and saw the trio. One of the cows commented, "Now there go a couple of intelligent ducks!" Mr. Frog heard this and, wanting to get full credit for his idea, said to the cows, "No, it was my id-eee-aaa ..."**

That's how disastrous pride and arrogance can be in our lives and in the life of this church.