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*"Christ caring for People  
through People"*

September 4, 2011

**Romans 11:10-36 (selected) (The Message)**

*When Israel tried to be right with God on her own, pursuing her own self-interest, she didn't succeed. The chosen ones of God were those who let God pursue his interest in them, and as a result received his stamp of legitimacy. The "self-interest Israel" became thick-skinned toward God. Moses and Isaiah both commented on this: Fed up with their quarrelsome, self-centered ways, God blurred their eyes and dulled their ears, Shut them in on themselves in a hall of mirrors.*

*The next question is, "Are they down for the count? Are they out of this for good?" And the answer is a clear-cut No. Ironically when they walked out, they left the door open and the outsiders walked in. But the next thing you know, the Jews were starting to wonder if perhaps they had walked out on a good thing. Now, if their leaving triggered this worldwide coming of non-Jewish outsiders to God's kingdom, just imagine the effect of their coming back! What a homecoming!*

*But I don't want to go on about them. It's you, the outsiders, that I'm concerned with now because my personal assignment is focused on the so-called outsiders. Behind and underneath all this there is a holy, God-planted, God-tended root. It's certainly possible to say, "Other branches were pruned so that I could be grafted in!" Well and good. But they were pruned because they were deadwood, no longer connected by belief and commitment to the root. The only reason you're on the tree is because your graft "took" when you believed, and because you're connected to that belief-nurturing root.. Be humbly mindful of the root that keeps you lithe and green. If God didn't think twice about taking pruning shears to the natural branches, why would he hesitate over you? He wouldn't give it a second thought. Make sure you stay alert to these qualities of gentle kindness and ruthless severity that exist side by side in God—ruthless with the deadwood, gentle with the grafted shoot. But don't presume on this gentleness. The moment you become deadwood, you're out of there.*

*From your point of view as you hear and embrace the good news of the Message, it looks like the Jews are God's enemies. But looked at from the long-range perspective of God's overall purpose, they remain God's oldest friends. God's gifts and God's call are under full warranty—never cancelled, never rescinded. Have you ever come on anything quite like this extravagant generosity of God, this deep, deep wisdom? It's way over our heads. We'll never figure it out.*

*Is there anyone around who can explain God: Anyone smart enough to tell him what to do?*

*Anyone who has done him such a huge favour that God has to ask his advice?*

*Everything comes from him; Everything happens through him; Everything ends up in him.*

*Always glory! Always praise! Yes. Yes. Yes.*

As we begin a new season of church fellowship, this passage from Paul contains a sharp and clear caution for us. It is easy for us, like the gentile Christians to whom Paul was speaking to begin thinking in terms of "insiders" and "outsiders" We draw circles that shut others out! When we do so we may soon find that we have shut out even God from our fellowship. God is the only one entitled to draw circles and form groups. And the circles that God draws are the circles that include others not exclude them.

We draw circles based on our own self-interests. When God draws the circles, ***"The chosen ones of God are those who let God pursue his interest in them, and as a result receive his stamp of legitimacy."***

To be in God's circle we need to let him provide the direction in which we move. When we make the choices we are soon outside God's will and work. Only as we await God's guidance will we find ourselves on his paths and not wandering off on our own. ***"Seek ye first the kingdom of God."*** says Jesus. May that be our plan, goal, and purpose as we move into this new season.

Father, teach us to walk in your ways and to give you all glory and praise. Amen.

(Rev.) John McGurrin