

■ Don't Despise Their Branches by Carl McMurray ■

■ *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. Romans 11:17-18.*

■ Paul is speaking, in the passage above, of the Gentiles as the wild olive shoot that was grafted in among the natural branches. In the context, he is encouraging these Gentile Christians not to be arrogant toward the Jewish Christians who were the original branches on God's spiritual olive tree. They were to remember that all the branches receive nourishment from the root, not the other way around. It was a good lesson for a church that was having problems between Gentile and Jewish Christians. I wonder if there is not more that can be drawn from this principle of controlling our arrogance toward roots and old branches.

■ For example. It appears to be a common fact of life that children often go through stages where they lack respect for their roots. The traditions, beliefs, and practices that their parents have spent a lifetime building are often attacked and discarded like old branches. The Gentile Christians were arrogant because they saw the problems in the old Jewish system and gave no thought to the richness of teaching and faith that also was a part of that system. They failed to appreciate that even with its problems, that same old system had brought the knowledge of God and the Savior to them. Children grow up and see mistakes that their parents make or inconsistencies that have crept into their lives. Little thought may be given to the sacrifices and struggles that perhaps played a part in bringing those inconsistencies to life. Even less thought is given to the years of guidance and instruction that brought the young intellectual to his present state of "higher learning." When the child begins to scorn the parents views and listens to their parents only with patient disdain, arrogance has set in. Such a child should remember that rare indeed is the parent at this point who doesn't have more real knowledge and understanding about the world and how it works than can ever be found in books, Twitter updates, or Facebook pages. Young person, it is not you who raised your parents and taught them, but they who loved and did the very best job they could raising you. Do not be arrogant toward their branches.

■ Teachers are another group that seem to draw the arrogant student from time to time. Bible class teachers are usually in a minority group in any church. This is because it is a difficult job to try and frame common truths into fresh, creative sessions of learning. The teacher must study to be able to answer any question (an impossible task in itself) and organize the class so that lessons and points will be remembered, perhaps preparing questions or visual aids to drive the points home in their student's mind. From time to time however, we have observed students who seem to take delight in proving the teacher wrong, correcting or embarrassing them publicly, or showing that *they* are really the experts on some point in the study that is actually their hobby. Little thought is given to hours of dedicated study that the teacher has put in or the discouraging pall that comes over a class when a public study is side tracked into a pride match. Certainly there are course corrections that can be discussed and made in class, yea, should be made. There are also times when correction might best be handled in private like Pricilla and Aquila with Apollos. May I say, Don't be arrogant of their branches. We should consider the good that a teacher is doing and let that mitigate our behavior.

■ One last application. The eldership. Few are called upon to give much consideration to the thought that you watch over, and will give account for, the souls of others. Elders in the Lord's church face that every single day. Elders are Holy Spirit qualified for their task. They are fair, reasonable, experienced in spiritual understanding, and have a love for the Lord's people. With that said, they are also men and are subject to the frailties and temptations of men. They will make mistakes, and miscalculations from time to time. They are not hypocrites or automatically disqualified for a failure of some kind; this just verifies they are men. But because they are leaders, they sometimes wear a bull's-eye for every problem. Often the reaction in these situations, for these men, is, shall we say, over the top? I will tell you from personal experience that I never experienced a sister screaming at me, until I served as an elder. I never had a brother or sister tell me to "Go to Hell," until I served as an elder. I never had anyone try and list 20 different sins I had supposedly committed and charge me publicly without ever speaking to me, until I served as an elder. At times like this all the qualification of the Spirit are moot. Nights without sleep, extra study time, hours in prayer, and all the experience in the world is of no account. All the good branches that such a leader may have carry no weight when the other person is "set" on their course and not open to advice, counsel, and teaching. I have not always been an elder. I have also served under them, submitting to good ones and to some that in my opinion we not so good, and I may yet again someday. I speak to myself then as well as each reader when I say, be not arrogant of their branches.

■ The point of all three of the above cases is just to say that those who go before us often help and shape us into what we are today. Be careful of arrogance when in our impatience we show disdain for the good and right efforts of those life coaches. That was the lesson Paul had for the gentile Christians and the lesson that the Holy Spirit saved for us.