

Romans 11:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear:

Analysis

Paul concedes the point factually—**Well; because of unbelief they were broken off** (tē apistia exeklasthēsan, τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ ἐξεκλάσθησαν). The cause of their breaking off was unbelief (apistia, ἀπιστία), not divine caprice. But Paul adds the Gentile's standing: **and thou standest by faith** (sy de tē pistei hestēkas, σὺ δὲ τῇ πίστει ἕστηκας). The contrast is stark: unbelief removed them; faith alone sustains you. This is not a difference in ethnic merit but in response to grace.

Paul's command: **Be not highminded, but fear** (mē hypsēla phronei alla phobou, μὴ ὑψηλὰ φρόνει ἀλλὰ φοβοῦ). Instead of arrogance (hypsēla, "high things"), cultivate fear (phobos, φόβος)—reverential awe and sober recognition of dependence on grace. The Gentile stands by faith alone, a gift, not achievement. Those who stand by grace should fear, not boast. The same unbelief that removed Jews could remove Gentiles (v. 21).

Historical Context

Paul warns against the pride that infected Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:7) and threatened Rome. Gentile believers must remember they contribute nothing to their standing—faith itself is God's gift (Ephesians 2:8). Fear and humility are appropriate responses to grace.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. Why does standing by faith alone necessitate fear rather than pride?
2. How does recognizing that Israel's unbelief is the *only* difference prevent ethnic or cultural superiority?
3. What is the proper 'fear' Paul commands, and how does it coexist with assurance of salvation?

Interlinear Text

καλῶς·	τῇ	ἀπιστίᾳ	ἐξεκλάσθησαν	σὺ	δὲ	τῇ
Well	G3588	because of unbelief	they were broken off	thou	and	G3588
G2573		G570	G1575	G4771	G1161	
πίστει	ἑστηκας	μὴ	ὕψηλοφρόνῃ, ἀλλὰ	φοβοῦ·		
by faith	standest	not	Be	but	fear	
G4102	G2476	G3361	G5309	G235	G5399	

Additional Cross-References

Romans 12:16 (Parallel theme): Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

1 Corinthians 10:12 (Parallel theme): Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

2 Corinthians 1:24 (Faith): Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.

1 Peter 1:17 (Parallel theme): And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear:

Philippians 2:12 (Parallel theme): Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

Hebrews 3:12 (Parallel theme): Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.

Isaiah 66:2 (Parallel theme): For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.

Proverbs 28:14 (Parallel theme): Happy is the man that feareth alway: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief.

1 Timothy 6:17 (Faith): Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;