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FRUITFULNESS: ENGRAFTED INTO LIFE

by Dan Trygg

Another phenomenon of nature which the apostle Paul used to illustrate the transforming power of new life in Christ is that of **grafting a branch from one tree into that of another** (Rom. 11:17-24). In farming, the branch to be grafted is selected from a tree that produces valuable fruit, and is incorporated into another healthy, but relatively worthless, tree. The host tree then provides the sustenance to enable the branch to produce the good fruit which it was designed by its nature to produce. The Scriptural analogy of Romans 11, as Paul recognized, is "contrary to nature" (vs. 24), in that the branch selected is from a wild olive tree, a tree that normally produces an inferior fruit. In the illustration, it is the life of the cultivated olive root stock which, after engrafting is completed, supports and *transforms* this wild olive branch, enabling it to bear good fruit. Paul uses this word picture to illustrate how the Gentiles are relative newcomers, and have not the "natural" claim to the promises and heritage of the people of God, as do the Jews. Nevertheless, God has joined them to this "tree" of His people, and they now enjoy the benefits and privileges of any natural branch. They can, moreover, by means of the life of the cultivated tree, produce the good fruit of that tree, in spite of their own natural beginnings.

There are some very significant parallels with this illustration, and that of the seed sown in Jn. 12:24. First and foremost, is the principle that **new life can only follow death**. Unless the wild branch is cut off and removed from its own life source and beginnings, it will never have the possibility of being joined in life to the new tree. Death is the first ingredient that makes this new life and fruitfulness possible. In order for this new life to come into being, the choice must be made to leave the old life principles behind so that new principles can become operational (II Cor. 5:14-17; Rom. 7:4-6; 8:2).

Another point which Paul makes is that this **life-giving power must come from outside of oneself**. As the seed needed water from outside of itself to germinate, so also this engrafted branch requires the sap of the good tree to overcome its own imperfect nature, and enable it to produce a healthier, richer fruit.

Furthermore, **the life-link must be maintained consistently** in order for fruitfulness to come to completion. The abiding place is at one and the same time the place of continued death to the old life, as well as the place where new transforming life is being received. As with Jn. 15, the fruitfulness sought for can only happen as this branch continues to draw its life from the new host tree. Any hindrance in this life-link will limit or frustrate fruitfulness.

As with the seed case, **the natural boundaries** of the branch **must be cast aside** for the new growth and fruit to be revealed. In order to produce fruit which is in accordance with the new root stock, the branch must become different in appearance. This takes place as the power of the new life overcomes the branch's former natural make-up. The appearance and quality of this new fruit will be entirely different from that which the branch would have produced in its original natural context.

To sum up, we who are Christ's have been joined to the Vine by being cut off from our old identity, through our death with Him. **Any hope for radical change comes from the overwhelming re-creative power of the resurrection life of Jesus**, which becomes available to those who are engrafted into Him by faith. This life-link, necessary for growth and fruitfulness, is maintained by the same methodology as our introduction into it. In essence, this is what Paul had written in Col. 2:6, "As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk in Him...". Again, in Gal. 6:15,16, he stated this foundational principle in another way, "For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And those who will walk by *this* rule, peace and mercy be upon them, even upon the Israel of God." What he is saying is that **the place of abiding**, the focus of our lives, the place where we receive Jesus' life, **is the life-link which we**

already have as new creatures. Abiding is continuing there and developing its potential. To stay there, however, means to continually choose death to self-seeking, in order to bear the fruit of God's life in us. Do not be distracted by looking for life anywhere else. Rather, continue walking as a new creature, as a branch in communion with the Vine. If you will do that, you will find the new life that is in you rising up to be expressed through you, and Jesus will be faithfully portrayed to the surrounding world uniquely through your life.

Father, we especially cherish the privilege of the "life-link" of power and of communion with You that makes fruitfulness possible. Open our hearts more and more to You, gracious Lord. You have conquered death and, as we taste of the goodness of new life, please enable us to fear it no longer. In Your abundant tenderness, show us, through even the littlest circumstances of life, that when we choose to die to selfish desires, and will obey Your voice, we will, in fact, experience the freshness of new life to rejuvenate us. May this strengthen us and help to take away the fear of dying to self.

FOR MEDITATION: Romans 7:4

"Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God."

Wesley And Small Groups

"It was in a small group that George Whitefield, Charles and John Wesley met to share and grow. Here, operating as a team in a hostile Oxford environment, these men formulated many of their aspirations which played significant roles in their revolutionary ministries thereafter.

"For decades, John Wesley found his messages meeting with great success with [large crowds]. Knowing, however, that great preaching, by itself, does not beget spiritual maturity, he immediately began gathering people into *societies*. Varying in number, here people were encouraged, safeguarded, and trained.

"Soon these societies were broken down into a small unit called the *class meeting*. The class meeting, which normally held between twelve and fifteen, became the heart of Wesley's movement. Neighborhood-centered in close proximity to a wise leader, here people discussed their spiritual progress, personal needs and struggles, giving rise to exchanges of advice and encouragement. Wesley commented, 'Advice of reproof was given as need required, quarrels were made up, misunderstandings removed. And after an hour or two spent in this labour of love, they concluded with prayer and thanksgiving.' (Works VIII, 253-54)

"These class meetings kept the flame of England's spiritual awakening alive for decades. For here, in sharp contrast to the cold formality of the Church of England, intimate love emerged, fleshing out the essence of God's kingdom. Wesley [wrote]... 'Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to "bear one another's burdens", and naturally to "care for one another". As they had daily a more intimate acquaintance with, so they had a more endeared affection for, each other.' (Works VIII, 254)"

Wesley had rediscovered much of the healthy dynamic of the early church. The strength of early Methodism was to be found in the quality of community experienced in these groups, the permitting and equipping of the common believer to do ministry, and that such groups could be effectively reproduced.