

# The Branch Of God's Planting

by Bill Onisick

*Forerunner, "Ready Answer,"*

*“ . . . and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree.” (Romans 11:17)*

On the third day of creation, God spoke:

“Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind . . .”; and it was so. . . . The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden . . . . And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. . . . Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. (Genesis 1:11; 2:8-9, 15)

For a brief time, the earth was an agricultural utopia. It ended abruptly with Adam and Eve’s rebellion in eating from the forbidden tree. God cursed the ground (Genesis 3:17), and ever since, man has labored mightily to produce food.

Early farmers likely began with the collection and replanting of self-pollinating seeds like wheat and barley. The discovery of plant cuttings and removing offshoots enabled some cultivation of fruit crops, but it was not until the discovery of grafting that they could consistently cultivate fruit trees.

Grafting is the process of joining two plants together so tightly that they grow together into one. The upper branch, called a scion, is tightly bound to the trunk of another plant, the rootstock. The bark is peeled where the two plants join to expose and align the cambium, the thin ribbon of actively dividing cells that produce conductive tissue for the actively growing plant. The two plants’ tightly compressed cambiums develop finger-like tissues that grow together into a grafted union.

The practice of grafting, which dates back over 4,000 years, has been used to accelerate fruitfulness, improve growth rates, and increase hardiness. Three key factors will result in successful grafting:

- The first factor is compatibility. The closer the two plants are alike, the higher the success rate. One cannot take a palm tree and successfully graft it to a grapevine.
- The second factor is alignment and pressure. The two plants must remain tightly bound, and their cambiums must line up as closely as possible.
- The third factor is proper care of the graft site. The grafter must keep the joint alive, hydrated, and free of disease while the two plants grow together.

## The Branch

Throughout the Bible, we find many scriptures about trees. The Bible often compares our Christian growth to a tree producing fruit. In its opening chapters, God creates fruit-bearing trees and a beautiful garden full of trees. In the last chapter of Revelation, the apostle John sees the Tree of Life, which bears twelve types of fruit. The book of Psalms begins with this metaphor, describing the

blessed and happy man: “He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper” (Psalm 1:3).

The prophets also use this image. Jeremiah speaks of the faithful man: “For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, . . . nor will [it] cease from yielding fruit” (Jeremiah 17:8). Isaiah 4:2 prophesies: “In that day the Branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for those of Israel who have escaped.”

The Branch mentioned here is a frequent symbol of Jesus Christ, who is of the God Family but also of the fruit of the earth, meaning He is both Godkind and humankind. Notice that only those chosen and rescued by God benefit from the enhanced production of fruit.

Isaiah 11:1 explains the Branch more fully: “And there shall come forth a Rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.” The Branch descends from the line of Jesse, the father of David. Jeremiah 23:5 and 33:15 both refer to “a Branch of righteousness” of Davidic lineage, and in Revelation 22:16 Jesus himself affirms, “I am the Root and the Offspring of David.”

### **Planting a Branch**

The end of Isaiah 61:3, speaking of those to whom Christ preached and converted, reads, “. . . that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.” Those who had suffered oppression by calamity and sin would become vigorous and strong like majestic, fruitful trees.

A few verses earlier, God says something similar: “Also your people shall all be righteous; they shall inherit the land forever, the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, that I may be glorified” (Isaiah 60:21). This is straightforward: God’s people will be a branch that He plants; they will be the work of His own hands. He will ensure their righteousness and their eternal inheritance of the Promised Land, all to His glory.

The phrase “the branch of My planting” deserves a closer look. The Hebrew word translated “planting” is *matt*’ (*Strong’s Concordance* #4302), meaning “an act of planting something.” The underlying root word is *nta*’ (*Strong’s* #5193), which adds clarity. It means “to establish, to found,” but more fundamentally, “to strike in, fix, and be fastened.”

These definitions probably lead us to think of planting seeds, but Isaiah 60:21 states that God is planting a *branch*. The word’s root helps clarify that the “planting” of a branch is what we would call grafting!

The apostle Paul writes in Romans 6:3-4 that we are baptized into the death of Jesus Christ, buried with Him in its waters. “By the glory of the Father,” He was resurrected from the dead, and by the same glory, we, too, can and “should walk in newness of life.” Then Paul writes, “For if we have been united [*planted*, KJV] together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of his resurrection” (Romans 6:5). As Jesus implies in Matthew 15:13, when the Father does the planting, it will not be uprooted!

The Greek word translated as “united [*planted*] together” appears only here, and it means “to be closely united to.” The underlying root emphasizes a union. Through our Savior’s resurrection, God

the Father has planted us together in a tight union, that is, in the analogy, He has grafted us to His Son Jesus Christ.

### **Holy Branches**

Paul later writes in Romans 11:16, “and if the root is holy, so are the branches.” Since the root of Jesse, Jesus Christ, “the righteous Branch,” is holy, the branches joined to Him must be holy too. Our holy God will not unite Himself with unholy offspring.

And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree. . . .

Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? (Romans 11:17, 22-24)

Just as Isaiah prophesied long before, Paul confirms here in Romans: We have been grafted into the God Family contrary to our nature and carnal mind. God the Father does the planting. Only those called by God the Father—whether Israelite or Gentile—have become “the branch of [God’s] planting” grafted to “the righteous Branch” and into His Family through the grace of God under the New Covenant.

The rest of Israel was broken off because of unbelief. Paul warns in Romans 11:7 that Israel became blinded and hardened. Drawing back from God, they could not form a grafted union with Jesus Christ. God did not spare these natural (Israelite) branches that fell into unbelief and disobedience. They suffered His wrath for their consistent disobedience. Likewise, He will not spare us if we fall into similar disobedience and become fruitless.

Paul was clearly familiar with the practice of grafting, as was his Roman audience. He uses this beautiful illustration to draw attention to the fact that God has grafted us into His Family by a method contrary to nature. In the natural process of grafting, a branch capable of producing fruit is grafted to a rootstock that can improve fruitfulness and vigor. But Paul says that we were the *unfruitful, wild* branch grafted contrary to our nature into the holy root stock.

We are the branch of God’s planting. He has stripped away our carnal, sinful bark through our Savior’s sacrifice and His granting of repentance (Romans 2:4; Acts 11:18; II Timothy 2:25). God the Father Himself has grafted us in—tightly bound us—to His Son, the Righteous Branch and Holy Root. Through our grafted union, we receive the nourishment of His Holy Spirit.

### **Vine and Branches**

As our Savior made ready to die for our sins, He told His disciples—us: “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit” (John 15:1-2).

God the Father is the Vinedresser, and we are, again, “the branch of God’s planting.” He has grafted us to the root of Jesus Christ, and now we are dead to sin but alive to God. Most of our Israelite ancestors were branches taken away because of disbelief. If they repent in the future, they will, as Paul wrote in Romans 11:23, be grafted back in. But our time is *now*, and we must do our part to remain in Him.

Jesus continues:

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine; neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. . . . By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. (John 15:4-5, 8)

Recall the three key success factors of a physical graft. They are the same elements required for a successful *spiritual* graft. The first, compatibility and likeness: Paul tells us, as the root is holy, so too must the branches be holy. God has called us to become holy, and if we desire holiness, we must plant holiness! Growing holiness is expensive because it costs us our complete devotion. We must learn to love—as God so loves us—sacrificing and holding nothing back! We must lay down our lives for each other (John 15:13).

The second success factor, alignment and pressure: The more tightly pressed together we are to Christ—the more we love Him and strive to emulate Him—the more aligned we are with Him and His way of life and the tighter our grafted union grows.

The third success factor, keep the joint alive, hydrated, and free of disease: It takes daily care—prayer, meditation, study, and occasional fasting—to ensure our grafted union remains active, nourished, and healthy through the Spirit of God and His living Word. These things, along with putting the things of God into practice as we learn them, help us develop and maintain the right attitude to bear much fruit. Through our strengthening grafted union to Jesus Christ, we receive the nourishment to produce the daily fruit of self-sacrificial love. This is how we become holy and pleasing to God.

### **Receive the Engrafted Word**

We were the wild, unfruitful branches with no potential. But God the Father, the Vinedresser, called us and peeled back our thick, carnal, and sinful bark. Through the sacrificial death of our Savior and the New Covenant, He bound us tightly together in a grafted union to the holy Root. Through Him, we receive the spiritual nourishment and water of life (see Revelation 22:1) required to grow together and produce fruit.

The apostle James uses a similar metaphor of implanting or engrafting, this time in reference to God’s Word: “Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted [*engrafted*, KJV] word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21).

We must work harder to remain aligned with Him in all things. As mentioned above, the cost of holiness is complete, self-sacrificial love. If we hold back love or forgiveness, we cannot be in Him. If we put anything in this world over our relationship with Him, we cannot be in Him. As James urges, we must repent of everything in us that is not like Christ.

We must reach out to Him with all our might and literally cling to Him! He is our *everything*, and without Him, we can do *nothing*! As we abide in Him, He abides in us. As we draw near to God, He draws near to us (James 4:8). In this way, our grafted union will grow strong as we produce the righteous fruit that pleases Him.

We are the branch of God's planting, grafted into His Family. As we humble ourselves and embrace His engrafted Word of life, we grow in union with Him, transformed into righteous, holy branches that produce the self-sacrificial fruit of love. One day soon, the branches of God's planting will inherit the land forever and glorify our great God and Father!