

Fruit That's Always In Season: Love Galatians 5:13-26

What's your favorite fruit? Strawberries? Mangos? Orange? Grapefruit? Water Melon? Peaches? Bananas? Susan is a banana expert, they cannot be too ripe or too green, she waits for them to be perfect. And if they go beyond their date of perfection she makes banana bread with them. As far as I am concerned she can have all the bananas she wants, I do not like bananas.

Fruit that tastes best when it's in season—every fruit is like that. Here in Florida we know when it is Orange season because of all the big trucks on the roads hauling oranges to be processed. Or we know when it is strawberry season because there are trucks along the road selling Plant City Strawberries. Peaches from Georgia. Watermelon from Southwest Florida. Apples mostly in the fall, etc. You get the idea there is always season for fruit.

There is, however, one fruit that is always in season. It's not a fruit that you eat but is one that everyone ought to enjoy—the **fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control**. We are beginning to take a close look at each one of these Spirit-fruit characteristics because God has sent his Holy Spirit to produce them in abundance in each one of us no matter what the season. **Our focus today will be on love.**

As we start this series here is a little back round. Paul wrote to Christians in Galatia, present-day central Turkey because false teachers were saying that believing in Jesus wasn't enough for salvation. These false teachers insisted that you needed to believe in Jesus and keep God's commands for entrance into heaven.

Paul however maintained that we are saved solely by what God has done for us through Jesus. We are free from the demands of the law. This doesn't mean that we are free to ignore God's commands. Paul anticipated that conclusion when he wrote: **"You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another humbly in love"** (Galatians 5:13).

Paul emphasizes that although we're no longer on the hook for having to keep all of God's commands to get into heaven, we will want to keep these commands because it shows thanks to God for the salvation he has given to us.

There is part of us, the sinful nature, that doesn't care about salvation. It just wants to live for the here and now. **Paul gave these examples of the works of the sinful nature: "sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like."** Paul then went on to say: **"I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God"** (Galatians 5:19-21).

Paul wanted the Galatian Christians and he wants us to know that we are no longer slaves to the sinful nature. We have been freed and now live by the Holy Spirit. Paul put it like this: **"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit"** (Galatians 5:24, 25).

Through baptism and faith in Jesus, our sinful nature has been crucified. It should no longer control us even though it hasn't actually died yet. there is a new force at work in our lives: the person of the Holy Spirit. **He works in us to produce fruit—the Fruit of the Spirit that we're going to take a closer look at in the coming weeks. Let's turn our attention now to the first one on the list: love.**

The sad truth is many people don't really know what love is. Love is more than an emotion or a feeling. Puppy love won't see you through the dog days of a marriage for example. (John Maxwell) **Love is an action.**

The Bible says that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. Tell me, do you get warm feelings when you think about yourself? Have you ever had a crush on yourself? I doubt it. **Instead when you think about yourself, you probably think about all the things that you could do better. Like how you could be a better parent or grandparent, or be a more obedient child. There are even things that you don't like about yourself. But does that keep you from taking care of yourself by eating, sleeping, and finding time to relax? No. Because you really do love yourself, and your love shows in the way that you act in your own best interests.**

Paul wants us to know that this kind of love is to be aimed not just at ourselves, but also at the people around us. And take notice how the Bible says that we are to love our neighbor—that's anyone and everyone around you, and not just those people who are nice to you. We're to love everyone regardless of their age, their skin color, or their economic status. We are to love them, that is, act in their best interests even if they don't do the same for us. We will want to do this because this is the kind of love God shows us.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul reminds us that God showed his love to us by sending Jesus to die for us while we were still sinners, not after we had cleaned up our act and sought his forgiveness (Romans 5:8).

So that makes love a choice, not a feeling. You don't have to have a nice feeling about someone to love them. It wasn't because we were attractive to God that he sent Jesus here to die for us. And so the grumpy cashier might not deserve your kind words, but because you've been called to love, you can and will choose to share kind words with that individual.

When we open our hearts to others and do things to help them, we risk being disappointed. We risk being betrayed. What happens if I give and the other person doesn't give back? What happens if I take the first step and they don't meet me? I have to say that I cannot tell you how many people I as a Pastor have poured love, grace and trust into over the years to have them just walk away from the church even some from what I thought was a good friendship.

But then I think that God took that risk when he sent Jesus to die for the whole world. Refusing to love others is actually the greater risk. The famous English author C.S. Lewis once wrote: **"Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to be sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness, but in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken, but it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The only place outside of heaven where you can be safe from all dangers of love is hell."** (from "The Four Loves")

Friends, are you withholding love from anyone? Why? Is it because you've been burned for sharing your love and you don't want to experience that again? God understands your pain. **Jesus faced it when his love for Judas ended in his own arrest.** But even then he didn't withhold love from Judas but still called him **"friend"** during the very act of betrayal.

It's not just Judas who has taken advantage of God's love, so do you and I whenever we indulge our sinful nature. And yet God doesn't remove his love from us. He continues to act in our best interest. He continues to forgive. And he calls us to keep doing the same.

God doesn't just call us to show love, he produces that love in us through the work of the Holy Spirit. **Martin Luther once said that just as a rock that is left out in the sun doesn't have to be commanded to become warm, so those who bask in the light of God's Word don't have to be commanded to show warm love. We will do this because when we're in the Word and believe what is written there, then the Holy Spirit is in us and he will move us to love others. So parents are you trying to get your children to be more loving? Keep them connected to the Word!** When we regularly are exposed to the light of God's Word the fruit of love will follow.

Love. It's fruit of the Spirit that is never out of season as there is never a time when love is out of place. Even when we discipline each other we do so out of love because we care about what sin is doing to another's relationship with the Lord. We'll spend more time talking about love because the rest of Paul's description of the fruit of the Spirit is really a description of love in action. May God bless our study in the upcoming weeks. Amen.