

Be a fruit basket

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

“A-tisket, a-tasket, A green and yellow basket, I wrote a letter to my love, and on the way, I dropped it”. Most of us probably learned this nursery rhyme before we even knew what a basket was! Baskets are useful contraptions often made of woven reeds or wood. Modern baskets can be made of other materials like cloth or plastic.

When my family moved to Warrington from Roslyn, we received a gift basket from the Welcome Wagon, filled with helpful guides and coupons. While our children were growing up, under a shelf in our kitchen hung a small basket for each child that served as their mailbox. Each year at the silent auction for Souderton Mennonite Homes there are a variety of gift baskets available to bid on featuring evenings out, vacation rentals, food stuffs, and toys for the kids. I keep a set of baskets at home for harvesting the vegetables we grow in our garden each year. Baskets, of many kinds, have been around for millennia. The Bible makes mention of baskets as far back as the Book of Genesis.

Here are some of the things they were used for in the Biblical record:

- Played a part in prophecy, as when the chief baker asked Joseph to interpret the dream where he had baskets of bread on his head, which unfortunately meant he was going to lose his head.

- A basket covered in pitch was used to save the infant Moses by floating him in the reeds of the Nile river.
- Baskets were used for Temple ritual and worship to hold breads of different varieties and purposes.
- In Jesus' parable of the net, the good fish are tossed into a basket, while the bad fish are discarded.
- 12 baskets were used to collect all the extra bread and fish at the feeding of the 5,000.
- Paul was delivered from danger when his followers lowered him in a basket through a hole in the wall.

Baskets can be used in so many ways!

It shouldn't be surprising then, that Paul encourages each of us to be fruit baskets, filled with the fruits of the Spirit. When he wrote to the Galatians there were things going on that were not becoming of Christians. People believed that because they were free and forgiven in Christ, they could continue to indulge in the desires of the flesh.

Paul points out that the desires of the flesh are in opposition to the Spirit. By indulging in fleshly desires, the people were failing to fulfill the calling of the Spirit to love their neighbor as themselves. The desires of the flesh are self-serving: sexual immorality, debauchery, idolatry, hatred, jealousy, selfish ambition, to name only a few of the desires called out by Paul. He reminds the Galatians that this is not the first time he has spoken this way.

It appears they were having a hard time coming to grips with what it means to be a Christian.

It is a well-known, but often hard learned, fact that the best way to get people to do what you want them to do is to tell them directly. We learn this when we tell our children not to do something and they do something else we don't want them to do. If we tell them what we want from them at the start, they are not left guessing what the right thing to do would be and will end up doing what we wanted in the first place. Well, most of the time!

So, Paul, being a wise man, having already told them what not to be doing, puts in writing what are the things the Galatians should be doing. They should be making themselves fruit baskets by filling up on the fruit of the Spirit. These things are like the antidote to the fleshly desires they had been indulging in.

The first fruit – love is the antidote to hatred. As Christians, the Galatians were called to love not only their neighbor, but also their enemies with the love of Christ. We, too, are called to love as Christ loved.

Next is Joy, the antidote to envy. It is impossible to be joyful if you are envious of others. God knows this and that is why we have a commandment telling us not to covet, or envy, another. Joy lifts one's spirit, envy crushes it.

Peace is a far cry from discord. It is important to remember that peace is not simply the absence of war. Discord and disharmony will destroy peace in a home, in a community, and in a nation. Seeking understanding and equality are the things that can lead us away from discord toward peace.

The green-eyed monster known as jealousy can be defeated through patience. How often do we experience a knee-jerk jealous reaction to someone else's good fortune? We feel we have somehow been slighted, only to find in time that God had good plans, better plans, in store for us. There is no need to feel jealous over another, God has all things under His control.

Kindness has a remarkable healing power. Those who learn to serve others, acting in kindness toward another human being and not engaging in selfish desires, have found that by seeking to lift the spirits of others they end up lifting their own as well.

When God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, He pronounced them good. And well they should be because they were filled with the goodness of God Himself. The selfish, crass desires noted by Paul in his letter, are counter to what God intended for His creation. Practicing the goodness of God, will bring us closer to His original intent for His people and His creation.

Faithfulness is a fruit of the Spirit that people have struggled with from the beginning of time. By falling away from faith in God and following

manmade idols and engaging in witchcraft, divination, and necromancy, the people of God found themselves besieged by other nations and carried into exile. We would do well to not fall into those same patterns and work to remain faithful to the One who has called us His own.

Even before Paul brought up the subject of gentleness, the teachings in Proverbs spoke of its wisdom: A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. (Proverbs 15:1). If anger leads to rage, then gentleness would be the antidote to both. Words can calm and words can provoke. We are to choose our words wisely and speak as God's spokespersons.

Choosing our words well is a sign of the self-control Paul uses to conclude his list of fruits of the Spirit. Selfish ambition and drunkenness are signs that we are lacking in self-control. When we can reign in our own selfish desires, controlling our appetites, we can live as children of God.

We are called by God to gather the fruits He offers us, to become that fruit basket. So how do we gather these fruits? By consciously seeking after the heart of God through our relationship with His Son Jesus. It may take some practice but take heart – Jesus knows how to do all these things well and will walk with us as we grow and flourish in the fruits of the Spirit. Then we can serve a world greatly in need of the gift of our special kind of fruit basket. May it be so.

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Hatfield Church of the Brethren