

What Are the 12 Fruits of the Holy Spirit? What They Really Mean

By Scott P. Richert

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Most Christians are familiar with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, knowledge, piety, fear of the Lord, and fortitude. These gifts, granted to Christians at their baptism and perfected in the Sacrament of Confirmation, are like virtues: They make the person who possesses them disposed to make proper choices and to do the right thing.

How Do the Fruits of the Holy Spirit Differ From the Gifts of the Holy Spirit?

If the gifts of the Holy Spirit are like virtues, the fruits of the Holy Spirit are the actions that those virtues produce. Prompted by the Holy Spirit, through the gifts of the Holy Spirit we bear fruit in the form of moral action. In other words, the fruits of the Holy Spirit are works that we can perform only with the aid of the Holy Spirit. The presence of these fruits is an indication that the Holy Spirit dwells in the Christian believer.

Where Are the Fruits of the Holy Spirit Found in the Bible?

Saint Paul, in the Letter to the Galatians (5:22), lists the fruits of the Holy Spirit. There are two different versions of the text. A shorter version, commonly used in both Catholic and Protestant Bibles today, lists nine fruits of the Holy Spirit; the longer version, which Saint Jerome used in his Latin translation of the Bible known as the Vulgate, includes three more. The Vulgate is the official text of the Bible that the Catholic Church uses; for that reason, the Catholic Church has always referred to the 12 fruits of the Holy Spirit.

The 12 Fruits of the Holy Spirit

The 12 fruits are charity (or love), joy, peace, patience, benignity (or kindness), goodness, longanimity (or long-suffering), mildness (or gentleness), faith, modesty, continency (or self-control), and chastity. (Longanimity, modesty, and chastity are the three fruits found only in the longer version of the text.)

Charity (or Love)

Charity is the love of God and of neighbor, without any thought of receiving something in return. It is not a "warm and fuzzy" feeling, however; charity is expressed in concrete action toward God and our fellow man.

Joy

Joy isn't emotional, in the sense that we commonly think of joy; rather, it is the state of being undisturbed by the negative things in life.

Peace

Peace is a tranquility in our soul that comes from relying on God. Rather than getting caught up in anxiety for the future, Christians, through the prompting of the Holy Spirit, trusts God to provide for them.

Patience

Patience is the ability to bear the imperfections of other people, through a knowledge of our own imperfections and our need for God's mercy and forgiveness.

Benignity (or Kindness)

Kindness is the willingness to give to others above and beyond what we own them.

Goodness

Goodness is the avoidance of evil and the embrace of what's right, even at the expense of one's earthly fame and fortune.

Longanimity (or Long-Suffering)

Longanimity is patience under provocation. While patience is properly directed at other's faults, to be long-suffering is to endure quietly the attacks of others.

Mildness (or Gentleness)

To be mild in behavior is to be forgiving rather than angry, gracious rather than vengeful. The gentle person is meek; like Christ Himself, Who said that "I am gentle and humble of heart" (Matthew 11:29) he does not insist on having his own way but yields to others for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

Faith

Faith, as a fruit of the Holy Spirit, means living our life in accordance with God's will at all times.

Modesty

Being modest means humbling yourself, acknowledging that any of your successes, achievements, talents, or merits are not truly your own but gifts from God.

Contenance

Contenance is self-control or temperance. It does not mean denying oneself what one needs or even necessarily what one wants (so long as what one wants is something good); rather, it is the exercise of moderation in all things.

Chastity

Chastity is the submission of physical desire to right reason, subjugating it to one's spiritual nature. Chastity means indulging our physical desires only within the appropriate contexts—for instance, engaging in sexual activity only within marriage.

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Scott P. Richert



Catholicism Expert

Education

M.A., Political Theory, Catholic University of America

B.A., Political Theory, Michigan State University

<https://www.learnreligions.com/scott-p-richert-541008>