



Question: "What is the difference between imputed and imparted righteousness?"

Answer: Imputed and imparted righteousness are theological concepts that deal with how believers are made right with God. These terms, though related, describe distinct aspects of how righteousness is received and manifested in our lives. It is the difference between *positional* righteousness and *practical* righteousness. Understanding the difference provides deeper insight into justification and sanctification.

Imputed righteousness refers to the righteousness of Christ being credited to the believer's account. To impute is to ascribe something to someone else. The doctrine of imputed righteousness is primarily concerned with the believer's legal standing before God. Because of sin, we are incapable of meeting God's perfect standard. However, we are justified or "counted" righteous through faith in Christ: "To him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works" (Romans 4:5–6, NKJV).

In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul writes, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (NKJV). This is the great exchange in salvation: Christ receives our sin, and we receive His righteousness. In this way, we are made right by God.

Imputed righteousness is solely the work of Christ. It is not infused into the believer but is instead an external righteousness that covers the believer like a garment, as described in Isaiah 61:10: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness" (NKJV). This imagery of being "clothed" with righteousness captures the idea that the believer's righteousness is not theirs but is received from Christ.

Some theological systems also teach *imparted righteousness*, which refers to the actual righteousness that the Holy Spirit produces within believers. To impart is to give or grant something. Use of the term *imparted righteousness* is found predominately in Methodism, Wesleyanism, and other parts of the Holiness movement. According to this doctrine, imparted righteousness is received at the moment of salvation and allows the believer to pursue a life of progressive holiness. So, imparted righteousness deals with

the practical outworking of sanctification.

Imparted righteousness is the result of the transformative work that occurs within believers as we are progressively made righteous through the power of the Holy Spirit. Supporting Scriptures include Romans 6:19, where Paul writes, “Just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness” (NKJV). Paul urges believers to actively yield ourselves to righteousness.

This ongoing process of sanctification is also described in Philippians 2:12–13: “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (NKJV). While salvation is completely a gift from God, believers are called to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in sanctification, allowing Christ’s righteousness to be imparted and manifested in their daily lives.

The concept of imparted righteousness is closely tied to spiritual growth and maturity. As believers yield to the Holy Spirit, they bear the fruit of righteousness (Galatians 5:22–23).

Imputed and imparted righteousness are distinct yet connected. Imputed righteousness provides the foundation for imparted righteousness. Justification leads to sanctification. Without the legal declaration of righteousness that comes through faith in Christ, there would be no basis for the Holy Spirit’s transformative work in our lives.

Moreover, imparted righteousness is the evidence of imputed righteousness. James 2:17 states, “Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (NKJV). Genuine faith, which receives the imputed righteousness of Christ, naturally results in a life that bears the marks of imparted righteousness. The believer’s righteous standing before God, secured through imputation, leads to a life of growing holiness through impartation.

Both imputed righteousness and imparted righteousness are gifts of God’s grace: “By grace, you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (NKJV). The imputed righteousness that justifies and the imparted righteousness that sanctifies are received through faith and are the work of God from start to finish.