

Imputed and Imparted

October 7, 2019 by Lawrence Nelson



The two words, imputed and imparted, are seldom used these days, yet they are so meaningful in God's plan of salvation. The Lord has impressed me to devote this presentation to an understanding of imputed and imparted righteousness so we may be ready to meet Jesus when He comes.

As we read the following statement by Ellen White from the Review and Herald, June 4, 1895, we can see that there is a vast difference between imputed and imparted righteousness. "The righteousness by which we are justified is imputed; the righteousness by which we are sanctified is imparted. The first is our title to heaven; the second is our fitness for heaven."

In Ephesians 5:27, God describes His church:

"That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

I am sure that each of us has at some time visited a home where the carpets were spotless and had just been vacuumed. The walls had recently been painted, and there were no dirty dishes in the sink. How beautiful the windows were as well; they were so clean that they just sparkled in the sunlight. In the bedroom, the bedspread was without a wrinkle. In fact, the entire house was so clean and inviting that you would have liked to live there.

In this text, God is not describing the carpets or the windows or the furnishings, for we are the church He is describing. As individuals God has a final objective for each of His people. He wants every member to become holy and without blemish. When this objective is realized, His church will become glorious, without spot or wrinkle. Praise

God! This will be accomplished, for we read, in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, "For this is the will of God, [even] your sanctification."

Sanctification

Before we study imputed and imparted righteousness, let us study the process of sanctification, for sanctification is the means that God will use to accomplish His glorious purpose for His church. God's sanctification process brings holiness within us, and holiness is righteousness. Let me be a little more specific. A righteous person is an individual who has experienced the giving of himself wholly and without reserve both in mind and body to God so that through the power of the Holy Spirit God is able to transform the character to become spotless in Christ Jesus.

Allow me to use a Bible illustration to make this process so simple that even the children can understand. Let us take the example of John, a disciple of Christ. Usually we think of him as a most loving disciple; and artists always seem to picture John as leaning on the bosom of the Saviour, looking up into the face of Jesus with tenderness, love, and compassion. But I have news for you! This was not the nature of John's character when Jesus called him to be a disciple. The Spirit of Prophecy describes John as having a violent spirit. (See The Acts of the Apostles, 557.)

You and I are acquainted with violence. We lock our car doors and make sure the windows are up when we travel through some of our large cities. One never knows when some thug will try to open your car door when you stop at a traffic light and thrust a gun in your face.

Contrasts

John had a violent spirit, which Jesus was able to change. The Saviour daily warned, cautioned, and reproofed John. How did John react to such reproof? He discovered his deficiencies, and he humbled himself. John resisted his evil tendencies and used every possible energy to overcome. Slowly, but surely, John made progress. He yielded his resentful, ambitious temper to the molding power of Christ.

Are you struggling with an evil temper? Do not give up! God can give you the victory just as John obtained a loving character. The secret key to John's change of character is found in the fact that he desired to be like Jesus. He wanted the love of Christ to completely transform him. Thus God was able to do a work of sanctification within him, and the results were amazing.

This "Son of Thunder," as the Bible describes him in Mark 3:17, was someone to fear. Before he met Jesus, he was the kind of a fellow about whom, if you saw him coming down the street toward you, your first inclination would be to step into a store or turn down a side street to avoid meeting him, for you never knew what he might do.

John permitted Christ to completely change his life. Later in life God was able to give him a divine revelation in which he beheld the ascended Redeemer in heaven. Christ was able to give him a mighty revelation of end-time events, revealing to him the final destruction of Satan's kingdom. It was the sanctifying power of God that changed John from a violent sinner to a loving saint.

In contrast, let us examine the life of another disciple, Judas. This fellow attained only a form of godliness in his daily walk with Jesus. Judas likewise observed the same patience, meekness, and tenderness expressed by Jesus; but Judas would not humble himself. Instead of desiring a change in his life, he resisted the divine love. He refused to acknowledge his failures.

John and Judas represent the two classes of individuals that are found in God's church today. Both classes profess to believe.

While John warred earnestly against his faults, Judas daily violated his conscience. He chose to yield to temptation rather than yield his will to Christ. In doing so, he refused the wisdom of heaven. Judas chose to walk in darkness. Secretly he cherished evil desires, even covetousness, filling his mind with sullen thoughts. Worst of all, he harbored doubt as to whether Christ was the Son of God.

Doubt

Will you permit me to pause here and briefly address doubt? Some years ago, when I was the youth director of the Southern Union Conference (Decatur, Georgia), I often met a young man by the name of Walter Rae. He was a young minister who attended workers' meetings where I spoke. I discovered that between meetings he liked to gather a group of the young ministers around him and tell them of his latest discoveries in the writings of Ellen White in which she had used the same words as some other author, thus creating doubt about her inspired writings.

I took this young man aside and told him that if he continued to cast doubts upon her writings that some day he would lose confidence and become an enemy of God's

truth. How well I remember his answer: “Why, Elder Nelson, I believe Ellen White’s writings. She was a prophet of God. I would never, never turn against her writings.”

But I firmly insisted, “If you continue to dwell upon doubt, mark my words, you will someday become an enemy of God’s mouthpiece.” After years of such doubt, he finally wrote the book, *The White Lie* (M&R Publications, Turlock, California, 1982), denying the validity of the ministry and the writings of Ellen White.

I plead with you; you cannot harbor doubt and remain committed to God. So it was with Judas. He continued to doubt Christ’s claim to be the Son of God, and Satan finally gained a full control of Judas—even while he was a professed believer and one of His disciples.

Equal Opportunities

I hope my comparison of these two disciples has alarmed you, for both had the same opportunity to study the divine pattern. Both were daily associated with Christ. Both listened to Christ’s teachings. Both possessed serious defects in their characters. Both had the same access to divine power. But mark the difference. John surrendered his life to become more and more like Jesus. He became a doer of the Word. John became sanctified through his faith in Christ while, on the other hand, Judas resisted the transforming power of grace and was finally brought into the bondage of Satan while still professing to be a disciple of Christ.

Forgive me, but I must ask you this question, Are you a John or a Judas? I know you have been attracted to Jesus or you would not be reading this magazine. You have become a professed believer in Him, so you are actually a disciple of Christ. But I must ask you again, Are you a John or a Judas? Oh, how I trust that you are a John in your daily life, that you are permitting Christ’s righteousness to daily sanctify you by His transforming grace.

Abiding in His Love

When we want an example of what sanctification can accomplish, we look to John who, by experience, teaches in his Book of 1 John 3:3, “Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” Such an experience is accomplished through submission to the will of God. This is why John said, in 1 John 2:6, “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.”

We must never be satisfied with empty profession, for sanctification can be summarized in these words penned by Ellen White: "As God is holy in His sphere, so fallen man, through faith in Christ, is to be holy in his sphere." The Acts of the Apostles, 559.

The secret of attaining such a goal in this life is to be continually abiding in the love of God. John learned this by experience. In 1 John 4:16 we read, "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." Yes, it is that simple. When Christ abides in the heart, the life will reveal practical godliness. The character will become purified. Pure doctrine will blend with works of righteousness. Heavenly precepts will mingle with holy practice. This is what we call sanctification. It is a lifelong experience.

Lifelong Experience

"Sanctification is not the work of a moment, an hour, a day, but of a lifetime. It is not gained by a happy flight of feeling, but is the result of constantly dying to sin, and constantly living for Christ. Wrongs cannot be righted nor reformations wrought in the character by feeble, intermittent efforts. It is only by long, persevering effort, sore discipline, and stern conflict, that we shall overcome. We know not one day how strong will be our conflict the next. So long as Satan reigns, we shall have self to subdue, besetting sins to overcome; so long as life shall last, there will be no stopping place, no point which we can reach and say, I have fully attained. Sanctification is the result of lifelong obedience. . . .

"So will it be with all who behold Christ. The nearer we come to Jesus, and the more clearly we discern the purity of His character, the more clearly shall we see the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and the less shall we feel like exalting ourselves. There will be a continual reaching out of the soul after God, a continual, earnest, heartbreaking confession of sin and humbling of the heart before Him. At every advance step in our Christian experience our repentance will deepen. We shall know that our sufficiency is in Christ alone and shall make the apostle's confession our own: 'I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing.' 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.' Romans 7:18; Galatians 6:14." Ibid., 560, 561.

Difference Between

This brings us to the core of our subject. In this salvation process, what is the difference between imputed and imparted righteousness? Inspiration answers this question with the clearest definition I have ever found. "The righteousness by which we are justified is imputed; the righteousness by which we are sanctified is imparted. The first is our title to heaven; the second is our fitness for heaven." Review and Herald, June 4, 1895,

Let us define the meaning of these two words. Imputed means, "to instantly credit to one's account." Imparted means, "to give daily from one's abundance to another." Imputed takes place instantly; imparted takes place continually, even for a lifetime.

Now we are ready to closely examine the phrase "imputed righteousness." This is the term used to explain what takes place when we ask God for forgiveness for past sins that we have confessed. Because He instantly justifies us by imputing Christ's righteousness to our record of sins, therefore we can stand before God as though we have never sinned. Because of this, God gives us a title to heaven.

An Allegory

Permit me to illustrate further, for I want you to grasp what is actually involved by using this allegory of myself. Let us say that I am a young, married man with a wife and two small children to support, but I have a problem—I have lost my job. I am having difficulty finding another job. In the meantime, the house rent is in arrears, and my wife tells me there is no more food in the house. The cupboards are bare. The children are hungry.

Fortunately I have a small savings account, so I go to the bank to get some money with which to buy food and pay some of the pressing bills. I stand in line waiting my turn. Finally I approach the teller's window with my withdrawal slip in my hand. I have signed my name on the slip, and I hand it to the teller, asking for \$100. The lady at the teller window has a strange look on her face. In fact she looks troubled. Finally she says, "Mr. Nelson, I cannot give you the \$100 because you have already overdrawn your account in this bank for \$100. In fact, you owe the bank \$100."

"What!" I am stunned. I had no idea I was in that much financial trouble. Not only am I out of a job and I have many bills, such as the house rent, but now I owe the bank! Today my children are hungry. What am I going to do?

Behind me, in the same line, is a very godly man who knows me, for I have worked for him from time to time. God has greatly blessed this gentleman with much, and he has helped many in their time of need. Seeing my dilemma, he steps forward and speaks to the teller, saying, "Take a hundred dollars out of my account and credit it to this man's account." I can hardly believe my ears! Instantly I do not owe the bank a penny. My account is paid in full. This friend has imputed credit from his account to my account. In other words, he has given me something that is not my own, yet when credited to my account, it cancels my debt. I turn around with a big smile and a handshake. I thank this godly gentleman and walk out of the bank, but then I stop. It is almost too good to believe.

As I pause to grasp the situation and decide what to do to get some food for my family, this same kind, loving man comes up and puts his arm around my shoulder. With the other hand he places a hundred dollar bill in my hand and says, "Mr. Nelson, you are still in need. Your children are hungry. Go to the market and buy the needed food." How can I show my gratitude and my thanks to this man?

In this allegory, we have discovered the meaning of imputed and imparted righteousness. This man tells me that I am in need of much more help. He tells me, "This is what I want you to do. Each morning, call me on the telephone and tell me how much you need for the day as long as you are in need of help." Thus, my daily needs are met by this good man. He imparts to me each day just what I need to meet my necessities. I cooperate with him by calling him daily. Then I take care of my business needs such as shopping.

How God Provides

This is exactly how God provides for the sinner's need. Not only does He instantly impute forgiveness for our sins of the past, while canceling our debts, but He covers these sins with Christ's righteousness. This gives us title to heaven, yet we need something more. We need the imparted righteousness of Christ for a daily sanctification, for when the righteousness of Christ is applied to our hearts, it gives us power to daily overcome all temptations and sins. Furthermore, through this sanctification process, we become victorious Christians, for the Holy Spirit is able to daily fit us for heaven where we will never sin again.

Christ demonstrated in His daily life while He was on earth how this is to take place. "Christ's humanity was united with divinity, and in this strength He would bear all the temptations that Satan could bring against Him, and yet keep His soul untainted by

sin. And this power to overcome He would give to every son and daughter of Adam who would accept by faith the righteous attributes of His character. . . .

“He showed that the sinner, by repentance and the exercise of faith in the righteousness of Christ, can be reconciled to God, and become a partaker of the divine nature, overcoming the corruption that is in the world through lust.” Selected Messages, Book 1, 223, 224.

What a power this is that is available to all of us! Ellen White states also that, “Men may have a power to resist evil—a power that neither earth, nor death, nor hell can master; a power that will place them where they may overcome as Christ overcame. Divinity and humanity may be combined in them.” Ibid., 409.

Lesson of the Virgins

Let us recall the story of the ten virgins. The story of the ten virgins illustrates the experience of the church that shall live just before Christ’s Second Coming. (See Christ’s Object Lessons, 406.) This refers to you and to me.

Read Matthew 25:1–10: “Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five [were] foolish. They that [were] foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, [Not so]; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.”

Difference Between

Though not apparent at first, there is a vast difference between the wise group and the foolish group. “The foolish virgins do not represent those who are hypocritical. They had a regard for truth, they advocated the truth, they were intending to go forth

to meet the bridegroom. They are attached to those who believe the truth, and go with them, having lamps, which represent a knowledge of the truth. When there was a revival in the church, their feelings were stirred; but they failed to have oil in their vessels, because they did not bring the principles of godliness into their daily life and character. They did not fall upon the rock Christ Jesus, and permit their old nature to be broken up. . . .

“Practical piety will not be attained by giving the grand truths of the Bible a place in the outer courts of the heart. The religion of the Bible must be brought into the large and the little affairs of life. It must furnish the powerful motives and principles that will regulate the Christian’s character and course of action.” Review and Herald, September 17, 1895.

In this same passage, the wise virgins are described as follows: “Those who earnestly search the Scriptures with much prayer, who rely upon God with firm faith, who obey his commandments, will be among those who are represented as wise virgins.” Ibid. The wise virgins keep God’s commandments through faith.

The foolish virgins were not truly born again; their old natures were not broken up. They had neither imputed nor imparted righteousness. They may have had periods in their lives when they were justified and were being sanctified, but this did not continue. “The foolish virgins have been content with a superficial work. They do not know God.” Christ’s Object Lessons, 411. They had not the indwelling Holy Spirit to furnish the powerful motives and principles that would have influenced their actions and changed their characters. Alas, while they loved the truth, had good intentions, and even taught the truth, they did not follow the example that Jesus had demonstrated.

The Foolish

Now, let us consider the foolish virgins further down the stream of time. We will note that the difference between the two groups widens and becomes more apparent. During the “tarrying time,” the lamps of the foolish virgins grew dim and went out. If the lamps in the parable represent a knowledge of the truth, as stated by Ellen White, what then does this mean?

Ellen White tells us that the foolish virgins become agents of Satan to utter his falsehoods and transmit his darkness: "The enemy has men in our ranks through whom he works, that the light which God has permitted to shine upon the heart and illuminate the chambers of the mind may be darkened. There are persons who have received the precious light of the righteousness of Christ, but they do not act upon it; they are foolish virgins. They prefer the sophistry of the enemy rather than the plain 'Thus saith the Lord.' When the blessing of God rested upon them in order that they might become channels of light, they did not go forward from light to a greater light; they permitted doubt and unbelief to come in, so that the truth which they had seen, became an uncertainty to them." Review and Herald, August 19, 1890.

"Those who hide their light will soon lose all power to let it shine. They are represented by the foolish virgins; and when the crisis comes, and the last call is made, 'Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him' [Matthew 25:6], they will find that while they have been mingling with the world, their light has gone out. They did not continue to provide themselves with the oil of grace. The peace-and-safety cry hushed them to slumber, and made them careless in regard to their light." Ibid., August 23, 1898. Though the foolish virgins had heard the precious message of the righteousness of faith, of justification and sanctification by faith, they had not acted upon it.

As we near the end of time, the foolish virgins in the church grow more and more careless as they mingle with the world and allow doubt and unbelief to ensnare them. Not until the crisis comes suddenly upon them will they realize that their lamps of truth have gone out, that the truth, which they once embraced, has become to them obscure and uncertain.

Instead of presenting truth to the world, they will have been proclaiming Satan's errors—such as the New Theology and that which takes place in Celebration. Is not this the part of the parable of the ten virgins being fulfilled in our very midst this very day? "Testing times come to all. How do we conduct ourselves under the test and proving of God? Do our lamps go out? or do we still keep them burning?" Ibid., September 17, 1895.

The Wise

Consider the facts. The five wise virgins had extra oil for their lamps. When asked by the foolish virgins to give them some of their oil, they refused. Why? Because the oil of the Holy Spirit changes the character by its sanctifying process. Therefore, the wise virgins had been fitted for heaven and were ready for the bridegroom. "That oil is the righteousness of Christ. It represents character, and character is not transferable. No man can secure it for another. Each must obtain for himself a character purified from every stain of sin." Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, 234. Now you can understand why the wise virgins could not give of their oil.

A Personal Experience

Our fitness for heaven is obtained through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is a lifelong process in which Christ's righteousness is imparted to our characters daily, just as the need arises. This is a personal experience and cannot be transferred. Husbands cannot go to heaven on their wives' characters just as wives cannot go to heaven on their husbands' characters. When children reach the age of accountability, they cannot go to heaven on their parents' characters. We must each individually have a daily infusion of the imparted righteousness of Christ in an experience with Jesus.

I feel like shouting this far and wide and praising God, for He has provided for each of us complete salvation. It is found in imputed righteousness, which is instantly available when we ask for forgiveness of past confessed sins, and He will impart His righteousness for our daily needs when we ask in faith. Ellen White expressed it this way: "Christ bears the penalty of man's past transgressions [this is imputed righteousness], and by imparting to man His righteousness, makes it possible for man to keep God's holy law." Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentaries, vol. 6, 1092.

What About You?

Beloved, are you a wise virgin? Are you aware of these precious gifts of righteousness? Are you daily pleading with God for His righteousness? Are you permitting the imparted righteousness to daily transform your character? Are you living each day in anticipation of the soon-coming Saviour, when you may go to heaven with Him where you will never sin? Are you preparing to live in the presence of the sinless, holy angels? Remember, this ultimate experience will take place for the wise virgins when the latter rain is poured out, for this will fit them for translation.

“Those who come up to every point, and stand every test, and overcome, be the price what it may, have heeded the counsel of the True Witness [the Holy Spirit], and they will receive the latter rain, and thus be fitted for translation.” Testimonies, vol. 1, 187.

“The heavenly character must be acquired on earth, or it can never be acquired at all.” Maranatha, 46.

Pray that God will reveal any unconfessed sins to you that you may claim His imputed righteousness to cover such sins by being repentant and asking for forgiveness. Daily seek a fitness for heaven through His imparted righteousness that you may be among the wise virgins and become fitted to live without sinning.

For over 60 years Pastor Lawrence Nelson served as an evangelist and minister for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Of that time, he served 13 years as the director of evangelism for youth at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Upon retirement from the General Conference, he continued to pastor, but when, as a result of his stand for truth, he was denied the opportunity to continue his pastorate, he started Keep the Faith Audio Tape Ministry, recording his sermons and making them available to individuals. Before his retirement from this ministry in 2004, over 18,000 audio tapes were being sent around the world each month.

📁 Salvation

🔖 foolish, righteousness, sanctification, virgins, wise