

*"Two men went up into the temple to pray; one was a Pharisee, and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and **prayed to himself** like this: 'God, I thank you, that **I am not like the rest of men, extortioners, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get.**'*

*But the tax collector, standing far away, wouldn't even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, **be merciful to me, a sinner!**'*

*I tell you, this man went down to his house **justified** rather than the other; for everyone who **exalts himself** will be humbled, but he who **humbles himself** will be exalted."* (Luke 18:10-14)

**Justified = no longer sporting the sinner label but now a saint.**

Being justified is **not a slight adjustment** or a pardon, as in **getting God to let go of an offense**.

Being **justified is our identity** in Christ, so we are to **embrace what God says** about who we are **instead of relying** on our good or bad works as **defining our identity**.

The reason **we can't justify ourselves** is because **only God's Word has power** to make things real. Our role is to **re-speak God's words** so that their **power is re-released and actualized**.

*Seek you Yahweh while he may be found; call you on him while he is near: let the **wicked forsake his way**, and the **unrighteous man his thoughts**; and let him **return to Yahweh**, and he will have mercy on him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For **my thoughts are not your thoughts**, neither are your ways my ways, says Yahweh. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are **my ways higher than your ways**, and **my thoughts** than your thoughts.*

*For as the rain comes down and the snow from the sky, and doesn't return there, but **waters the earth**, and **makes it bring forth and bud**, and gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goes forth out of my mouth: it shall **not return to me void**, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing I sent it to do.* (Isaiah 55:6-11)

*Therefore, **putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with humility the implanted word**, which is able to save your souls.* (James 1:21)

What does it mean to **put away** filthiness and wickedness? **It involves our thoughts** first that result in our ways reflecting what circulates in our thoughts. And we do this by having our **imagination washed** with the **water of the Word** of God that effectively displaces filthy thoughts. **Shower in the Word!**

***I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.*** (See John 1:14; and 1 John 4:2) ***I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my ordinances, and do them. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will save you from all your uncleanness: and I will call for the grain, and will multiply it, and lay no famine on you. I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that you may receive no more the reproach of famine among the nations. Then shall you remember your evil ways, and your doings that were not good; and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations.*** (Ezekiel 36:25-31)

*The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." Jesus answered him, saying, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'" (Luke 4:3-4)*

What is the **Word of God concerning you and me**? It is first of all **His Word informing us of our identity** and our relationship to Him. And because Christ has **already justified all of us** before God, the **identity Jesus received** and believed from His Father is the identity that has **already been implanted in us**. The only thing keeping us from living the life Jesus lived is our willingness to believe what is **already declared to be true** about us that came to us in **God's Word to Jesus** at His baptism.

*Now it happened, when all the people were baptized, Jesus also had been **baptized, and was praying**. The sky was opened, and the **Holy Spirit descended** in a bodily form as a dove on him; and a voice came out of the sky, saying "**You are my beloved Son. In you I am well pleased.**" (Luke 3:21-22)*

Being **justified** means **having a right identity** that **restores our original relation** to God at creation as His **image-bearers**. The only thing for us to do is to **believe it** and **allow His Spirit to live in us**.

**Salvation is all about identity**. And what we **believe about our identity** has everything to do with **how we relate** to everything situation in life, steering how we make decisions and how we reflect God.

*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? May it never be! **We who died to sin**, how could we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were **baptized into his death**? We were **buried** therefore **with him through baptism to death**, that just like Christ was **raised from the dead** through the glory of the Father, so we also might **walk in newness of life**. For if we have become **united with him** in the likeness of his death, we will **also be part** of his resurrection; knowing this, that our **old man was crucified** with him, that the body of **sin might be done away with**, so that we would **no longer be in bondage to sin**. For he who has died has been **freed from sin**. (Romans 6:1-7)*

**Baptism is our signal** to the watching universe that we have **chosen to be identified with Jesus**. Do not slip into the trap of thinking that baptism is about joining a church denomination. It can be easy to assume that, but baptism is entirely about **identifying with Jesus**, receiving **our identity through His identity**. We **put away getting our identity** from any **human organization** or person or **feeling** or past **mistakes or achievements**. Our **identity is in Christ alone**.

*For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:3)*

Let us embrace our true **identity through baptism separate from membership** in a group of believers who are headed in a similar direction as us. That is about **fellowship**, but is not to be our identity.

Our **old identity is past** tense, invalid, mute and powerless – not because we defeated or overcame it, but because we **swapped** it out for our **true identity based solely on the Word of God**.

Baptism is the **outward sign of our identity swap**, and from then on we **affirm our decision** continually by **immersing ourselves in the promises** of God that **affirm our new creation identity** and **disarms** any and all allegations and feelings that **contradict His Word** over us.