

Frontlines

Week 2: Image

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

We're going to play a little game as we get started. "Who am I?" See if you can guess who said or sang the following lines:

- "Who are you? Who, who? Who, who?" -The Who
- "I'm every woman. It's all in me." -Chaka Khan
- "I'm still Jenny from the block." -Jennifer Lopez
- "I'm the king of the world!" -Jack Dawson (R.I.P.) / Leonardo DiCaprio
- "I know who I am! I'm a dude playing a dude disguised as another dude!" -Robert Downy Jr.
- "I am what I am." -Pam Beesly, The Office
- "I yam what I yam." -Popeye

So, let me ask you, "Who are you?"

Most of us would answer with our job, our role in our family, our relationship status, interests. I might say, "I'm a husband, dad, pastor, runner, and cyclist." You might say you're a mom, a student, a book worm, a cat person, a dog person. A preacher's kid! We use these categories to capture a little bit about who we are and the things we share in common with others.

Others want to figure us out, or we want to learn more about ourselves, so we take personality assessments. Some of you are so well versed in them from companies you've been a part of that when I say that "I'm a high I.S., INFP, 7 wing 6" you pretty much know everything there is to know about me!

And all of these things are good. Categories and roles and personality assessments give us insight into ourselves and others. They help us understand our place in the world and how we can contribute to it. But, they're limited in defining who we truly are. We are all more complex than the categories we put ourselves in, or others put us in. Even more dangerous is when these categories become the primary source of our identity.

We've seen this in the rise of Identity Politics, which isn't just a political term. Identity Politics is centering our sense of self on one particular attribute of our identity and then

defining everything else by it. That one aspect of your identity becomes the lens through which you look at and evaluate everything else.

So, if you're a fan of a team, you don't just cheer for them, you become them. If your team is doing well, life is good. Lose a few games and everything has a dark cloud over it. If your team wins, you say, "We won!" when in reality, THEY won while you sat on the chair and ate chips and queso!

How do you know someone's a runner? Don't worry, we'll tell you! Even the details you don't want to hear.

We can take anything and turn it into our identity, and then that becomes the filter through which we think about and see everything else. We arrange and align our lives to it. And because so much of our sense of self and purpose and meaning gets wrapped up into that part of our identity, we get really defensive if anyone disagrees with it. They're not just disagreeing with something we do or a way we think, all the sudden, they're attacking who we are. The very foundation we've built our lives on.

I think this is why we've lost civility in parts of our world today, especially in our own nation. We've taken parts of who we are, or things we believe, and made them central to who we are. Said differently, we have a way of taking something that should be a chapter in our story and making it the title.

And the danger of this is, if you define yourself by a **chapter** in your life, what happens when that chapter comes to an end? Parents, what happens when the kids fly the coup? Empty nest syndrome is real. It's so easy to wrap our entire identity around our kids that we don't know who we are anymore, individually or as a couple, once they've grown up and are out of the house.

If your identity is built on a successful career, who are you when the company downsizes or you retire? If it's built on following the latest trends and keeping up with everyone around you, who are you when trends change and people go on better summer vacations than you do?

In the book, *Identity Crisis: Reclaiming the Truth of Who We Are in Christ*, Hannah Anderson writes, "If we've invested our sense of self in something small, temporal, and unstable, we will become small, temporal, and unstable people."

So, who are you, *really*? Not a label. Not a category. Who are you at your essence? The Bible says that, at our core, each one of us is an image bearer of God...(set up and read Genesis 1:26-27)

What does it mean to be made in the image of God? Doesn't mean we're made in His physical image. God exists outside of time and space, so He's not bound to the same

physical limitations we are. Being made in His image means we share his attributes and character.

Being an image bearer of the Creator means, when we create, it's a reflection of God's image in us.

Being an image bearer of the Father means, when we love another person deeply, it's a reflection of God's image in us.

Being an image bearer of the God of Angel Armies means, when we want to stand up for what is right and protect the vulnerable, it's a reflection of God's image in us.

These are all demonstrations of God's image firmly implanted on each and every one of us. Every person who has ever existed, or will ever exist, for all time. But, more than anything, being made in the image of God means that our deepest sense of self can only be found in Him.

Not in categories, not in the roles we play, not in our success or failures, not in what others think of us or the image we try to project. Our deepest sense of self is found ONLY in Him. Which means our deepest sense of SATISFACTION can only be found in Him. We were created to carry the image of our Creator around with us. No other image we try to put before others comes before that.

I think this truth has two implications for our life right here, right now. First, **our identity as image bearers ELEVATES us.** Before we even take our first breath, each one of us has the image of God in us. That reality gives dignity and purpose and meaning and value to every life.

Every person we have ever seen, and will ever see, carries the image of God with them. And it might be buried behind a lot of stuff they've put in the way, but it's there. It's in them and it's in you. All of us bear the image of the King and that elevates us to be more than just primates who've evolved over time or merely a product of chance. We have been created in the image of God, Imago Dei, and each one of us has an intrinsic value because of it.

And so, our identity as image bearers elevates us, **but it should also HUMBLE us.** An image bearer points to something beyond itself. It's not the thing itself. Like the moon doesn't put off any light of its own, it only reflects the sun; we're not the sun! We are not the Creator and King. We bear His image, but we are not Him.

This truth ought to humble us and right-size the way we think and view ourselves. I think it confronts both our pride and our insecurity. **Pride says, "I am everything!" Insecurity says, "I am nothing!" But being an image bearer is having the humility to say, "I'm neither everything or nothing. I belong to God."**

THIS is who you were made to be. An image bearer of your Creator and King. But in each one of us, there is this pesky thing called sin that says, “You know, instead of finding your identity in your Creator and humbling yourself before your King, why don’t you just take the reins and create your own identity?” And instead of reflecting God’s glory, which is what we were made to do, we try to usurp it. To take it for ourselves.

And we **take** God’s rightful rule and reign over us just like Adam and Eve **took** the forbidden fruit in Genesis 3. We reach out, apart from God, for independence and freedom. We reach out to find our identity apart from Him and what we pull back is sorrow, confusion, and pain. Scripture calls it death. It’s a death of who we were made to be.

You see, sin turns us inward. We stop reflecting God and we start trying to replace Him with mere shadows of the real thing. We replace the glory of his identity on us with categories and roles and perfectly curates images we project to the world around us. But eventually, cracks begin to form and it all falls apart.

God knows this, which is why He sent Jesus. Jesus came as the perfect representation of God’s image lived out in the world. He came to show us who God is and what He’s like, but I think He also shows us who we are when we live in the freedom and joy of being God’s image bearers. Jesus came to restore us back to who we were made to be. And while His grace is free, what he asks of us is costly.

Mark 8:34-37...(READ)

When we exchange our souls and forfeit the image of God in us, Satan promises to give us the world, *everything we’ve ever wanted*, but in the end, we’re left with nothing. **The paradox of the Gospel is that, if you want to find life, you must first lay yours down.**

Last week, Matt kicked off our new series by reframing the words “obedience” and “repentance” as freedom words. Practices we think of as being repressive that actually lead to life. We’re doing to add a few more words to that last over the course of this series, but our word for today is this: **Surrender.**

We hear that word and think weakness. Losing. Giving up. Giving in. But Jesus says, if you want to find life, surrender is the pathway to get you there. He’s honest with us and says, “You can try to hold onto your life, but you’re going to lose it. The only way to find true life and meaning and purpose...to live out the image of God that is in you...is to surrender yourself to Me.” And as we surrender to Him, God begins to renew His image in us.

The Apostle Paul says in **Ephesians 1:13-14**, “When you believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing your inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession – to the praise of His glory.”

A seal was hot wax poured on an official document that was impressed with a ring that had the king's image on it. When we surrender and follow Jesus, we have God's image IN us and we have God's image ON us. We are marked as His for all time.

But it doesn't stop there. He then sends us out into the frontlines to be a part of restoring God's image in others and the world around us. **2 Corinthians 5:17-19 says...(READ)**

If you are in Christ, which is the New Testaments favorite way to describe those of us who follow Jesus and call ourselves Christians...if you are in Christ, you are a new creation. You are no longer defined by a chapter or aspect of your life. God's image is being restored in you and you've been sent out into the world to restore it in others.

If you are in Christ, you are a new creation! And it doesn't matter what others think about you, or the image you're trying so hard to manage, that's not who you are. No, if you are in Christ, if you have surrendered your life to Him, this is who you are. Would you say these with me...

In Christ:

I am loved. (Romans 5:8)

I am forgiven. (Ephesians 1:7)

I am adopted. (Romans 8:15)

I am chosen. (Ephesians 1:4)

I am God's workmanship. (Ephesians 2:10)

I am a new creation. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

I am God's child. (John 1:12)

I am free from condemnation. (Romans 8:1)

I am an ambassador of Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:20)

I am a citizen of heaven. (Philippians 3:20)

I am more than a conqueror. (Romans 8:37)

I am being transformed into His image. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

If you are in Christ, THIS is who you are. You are someone created with God's image IN you, and redeemed by Jesus, stamped with God's image ON you. That's an identity worthy of a title. That's an image that will never fade and can never be taken away.

Invitation/Response Time