



VOICES 2020: IMAGO DEI

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Scripture Reference: Genesis 3:1-7

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

Hey Doxa folks, I'm glad to be here with you. My name is Jackie Hill Perry. I live in Atlanta with my husband and our two children. Obviously it would have been preferred for us to all meet in person, but the way COVID-19 is set up, that's not possible. But I am thankful that God has allowed us to have these different technologies and things that give us the opportunity to still be able to edify and share with each other. Thank you, Pastor Jeff for inviting me to be a part of this Voice series.

I'm always thankful for your voice and your intentionality on all things gospel. And so, hope, I hope whatever I bring today that it will be helpful.

Today I just kind of want to talk about a super simple and fundamental idea that we see throughout the Scriptures, which is what it means to be an image-bearer, what it is to have identity shaped by the gospel and by the God that created us for himself. If any of you on social media at all, specifically Instagram and Twitter, you yourself have most likely noticed that everyone has a bio section on their page. In this bio section, this is the area where people put, simply, what they want you to know about them. So my bio for example says that I am a disciple, that I am a mother, that I'm a writer, teacher, a wife, did I mention that, a poet, a MC, because those are the particular things that I do. Other people might have that they, you know, are a bad cook and a great dancer. I don't know, I'm just winging it. But you get the gist of the bio is our chance to learn about someone before we choose to follow them or not. For those of us who have ever written a social media bio, there's some intentionality behind it.

One way we know this to be the is because we don't write down the things in our bio that we are embarrassed about or the things that we don't want people to know. We typically leave the bad stuff out because the bio is the way that I introduce myself to one, to someone. That this bio is the version of myself that I prefer for someone to know. For those of us who have not only written a bio, but have also read a bio, specifically bios of people that we've never met, we'll read what they have to say about themselves and, usually, we take their word for it. So if we read that someone is a pastor's wife, a mother, a Bible teacher, you might believe that that is who this person is.

And if you follow them long enough, you will eventually affirm them as that. You might see them post a picture of them serving a church, or cooking for their children, and in the comments you'll write, "You are such a great wife, and such a great mother! I am so encouraged by your servant leadership!" And what this is, is that this is a small picture of what is happening to us and with us all the time. Which is, we are constantly projecting to people who we believe ourselves to be. And in turn, we are constantly receiving from people who they think we are.

But the question is, is who I think I am and is who people are saying I am, is it true? And where do I go to find out the truth of who I am and who I should be? These are

really significant questions because we live in a culture, and in a world, and in society, and in a body that is communicating all kinds of identities for us to grab a hold of. And I think the fundamental and primary identity that we need to figure out is who God made us to be. Because how we see ourselves usually will determine how we behave. So let's pray.

God, I thank you for today. I thank you for your Scriptures. I thank you that they are a light unto our feet. I thank you that they are profitable for teaching, and for correction, and for review, and for training, and righteousness. I'm thank you that they are God-breathed. So we know that when we read them, and learn from them we are hearing from you. I pray that you would meet us in this moment. In Jesus name, amen.

In the beginning, in Genesis 1:1, it says that God created the heavens and the earth. And as he did, he made light, he made land, he made water, he made vegetation, and living creatures. And if you just skim through Genesis 1, you'll notice that the language used by God to bring these things into being is consistent. If you open your Bibles to Genesis 1 and follow me, you'll see what I mean. In Genesis 1, verse 3, he says, it says, And God said, let there be light, and there was light. In Genesis 1 verse 6 says, And God said, let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters and let it separate the waters from the waters. In Genesis 1, verse 9, it says, Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place and let the dry land appear. In Genesis 1 verse 22, verse 24, it says, And God said, let the earth bring forth living creatures, according to their kinds, livestock and creeping things and be so the earth, according to their kinds. And it was so.

If you survey these passages, you see two phrases being repeated. These phrases are "God said" and "Let the" or "Let there". The entire world and the entire universe is being made by the effectual word of God. He speaks and things happen. Let there be light, and there is light. God is God, so he doesn't use his hands or any outside resources to create. He just says it, and it is so, as God creates a light, and land, and water, vegetation, and living creatures, the language, remember, is the same. But, it's when we move on down to verse 26, the language shifts, it changes. The repetitive nature of how God brought all of creation into being stops when God decides to make something else.

Verse 26 says, Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Language is totally different as if God is saying, What I am making now is all together different than anything that I have made before. And what is it that he has made this

time? This time he's making man. And he's made man in his image and after his likeness. So when talking about ourselves, in trying to understand our own Bibles, if you will, we are always asking the question, who am I? And I wonder if that was a common question before the Fall. And if it was, I suppose that Adam and Eve actually knew where to go to get the answer. But post-Fall in our search for identity, God is kind of low on the totem pole for where we get the answer. And for that reason and seeking identity, we are big towards gathering our identities horizontally instead of vertically. So whatever is around us then tends to contribute to our understanding of ourselves, whether that is our job, or people, or relationships, or give things, or the money in our bank account, all of these things become tools by which we label ourselves.

There's a quote by Paul Tripp that I think speaks to this idea super well. He says, We often buy the delusion that identity is tangible and can be found in the physical world. It's not, and it can't. Think about it, our meaning and purpose is derived by faith from a vertical relationship with an unseen God – not horizontally from what we touch or feel or experience. We also by the delusion that what we have is going to last. But your future success in business isn't guaranteed. Your church or ministry won't stick around forever. Your kids will grow up and move out. Your body will change its shape, wrinkle, weaken and malfunction. When you seek identity from a horizontal or tangible experience, you are placing your hope in something that will wither and fade. Only God outlasts time. Only God avoids decay. Only God excludes or eludes chaos. Trusting anything or anyone else is a delusional danger that inevitably will come crashing down.

Something Paul Tripp said that I think is key, and why going to God for identity isn't natural for us is this. He said, our meaning and purpose is derived by faith from a vertical relationship with an unseen God, not horizontally from what we touch or feel or experience. Faith is not natural for us, doubt is. And we don't need faith to get identity from things that we can see, touch, and feel, like our families, our intelligence, our money. Because, again, faith is the assurance of things hoped for the conviction of things not seen. So we need faith to then read God's word and believe what it says about who we are. So maybe that's why it's so hard for us to do it consistently. And looking to God's word, to find the answer for, Who am I?

Genesis 1 gives us the prerequisite or foundational answer. Genesis 1 verse 27 says that Adam and Eve, and thus us are image-bearers of the living God. Being an image-bearer means a few things, it has a few implications, but I'm going to touch on two.

The first being that being an image-bearer of God gives us purpose. Our primary purpose, being to love and enjoy him with everything that we are. If you have your Bibles or your phones or your iPads or your or your MacBook or your PC, God bless you, go ahead and turn to Matthew 22 verse 19.

I'll read, it says, Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? But Jesus, aware of their malice said, Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin for the tax. And they brought him a denarius. And Jesus said to them, Whose likeness and inscription is this? They said, Caesars. And he said to them, Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God, the things that are God's.

Jesus being the wise man that he is tells them that if this coin has Caesar's image on it, then it rightly belongs to Caesar. So if it belongs to Caesar, give it to Caesar. But the implication also is who, whose image is God's image inscribed on? Humanity. So if that is the case, if God's image is inscribed on humanity, then if we need to give to God what belongs to God, then that means that all of us need to give to God what belongs to him, which is ourselves. Meaning our body, our talents, our gifts, our thoughts are drained for by him. Colossians 1:16 says for, by him, all things were created through him and for him. God didn't create us and leave us aimless to figure out our purpose or look to people to hand us our purpose. Our being made in the image of God automatically tells us who we are and who we were made for.

So when it comes to the particulars of life, then, should I marry this person? Should I go to this school? Should I get this degree? Should I move to this city? It doesn't have to be as complicated as we tend to make it. It just becomes which decision will help me submit to my purpose. So then we can reframe the question as which city will help me glorify God best? Which school will help me make God known? Which spouse will help me and not hinder me in getting to know God. Having a framework for your being an image-bearer sets you free to live how you were created to live.

The second thing is that being made in the image of God means that we matter. We as human beings, we have an innate dignity because we bear God's image. And I know for me personally, it doesn't take nearly as much effort for me to believe that I, as an image-bearer, deserve honor and respect as it does for me to believe it of others. I can find out what I truly believe about the doctrine of the Imago Dei by paying attention to how I treat people. And if I really care about what it means to be an image-bearer, I'll notice it in how I treat people. Let me explain.

In Genesis 9, God is making a covenant with Noah after the flood water subsides. In it, God tells Noah that there will be consequences for whoever chooses or decides to take a man's life. I'll read it verbatim. Verse 6 says, Whoever sheds the blood of man by man, shall his blood be shed, for, or because, God made man in his own image. The value of human life is so high that God told Noah that if anyone would have the audacity to take it, then their own would be taken as well. And why is the reason that God gives? Because humanity bears the image of the living God.

When we move in the other direction, in the new Testament, you find yourself in the book of James. Over in chapter 3, James is talking about the tongue and how it's a fire and a world of unrighteousness, if you've been on Twitter, you can attest to that, and how it's a restless, evil. And do you know what example he gives for how this evil looks? He says that we do it when we use the same tongue to bless our Lord and Father, to curse people. And he doesn't just leave it at people. He qualifies it by saying this is a wicked thing that we do with our tongues. When we use the same tongue that we bless God would to curse people who are made in the image of God. In Genesis 9, there are consequences for what is done to a person made in the image of God. In James 3, there are consequences for what it said about a person made in the image of God.

The point is then, that every person alive, black, white, Asian, Hispanic, gay, straight, immigrant, elderly, poor, privileged, mentally ill, mentally disabled, single, married, whatever, or whoever they are, they all bear the image of God. So we must think twice before we even think to treat them as if they don't. We're in a society and a culture and a time in America where this is such necessary teaching, because we are able to observe and see the fruits of what happens when people do not honor people as people. Whether it be George Floyd, whether it be Trayvon Martin, whether it be Mike Brown, whether it be Breonna Taylor, we see what happens when people don't love people.

And so to dishonor, this, this ethic of people being made in the image of God, is to put yourself in the position to treat people as if they were made in the image of the devil. And it ought not be so. Image-bearers matter to God. So they must matter to us. But the interesting thing is the fact that we have to be exhorted and challenged, to love other image-bearers as well, tells us that something is wrong. All things must not be as they should, if, when it comes to our being made in the image of God, because if it were, we wouldn't have racism, we wouldn't have white supremacy. We wouldn't have systemic injustice. We wouldn't have abortion. We wouldn't have murder. We

wouldn't have disrespect and dishonor in our marriages. We wouldn't have gossip. We wouldn't have sex trafficking. We wouldn't have pornography. We wouldn't have all of these negative, evil, wicked things happening among us. How is it that we are all made in God's image? And yet we live in a world surrounded by image-bearers, that looks so much like the devil.

In Genesis 1, that the God blesses Adam and Eve, verse 31, says that God saw everything he made and that it was very good. Adam and Eve were included in what we call good, but the Romans what God called good. But in Romans 3, or Paul, is talking about unrighteousness. He says that no one is good. And in Mark 10, when Jesus is having a conversation with the rich young ruler, he says, no one, but God is good. So what happened? What happened between God calling people he made in his image, good, and Jesus and Paul telling us that no one is good.?

How do we get here when we can see that goodness is not in us, nor is it always around us? What happened to image-bearers? Deception happened. You can turn back to Genesis 3 with me, I'll read starting at verse 1. It says, Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, Did God actually say you shall not eat of any tree in the garden? And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden. Neither shall you touch it unless you die. But the serpent said to the woman, You will not surely die for. God knows when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God knowing good and evil. So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was a delight to the eyes, that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. And she also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate and the eyes of both were opened and they knew they were naked.

There is so much here, but I just want to talk about one thing. And that is, did you notice when the devil came to Eve, tempting her to distrust the word and the person of God, that one of the ways that he did it was by telling her that she could take a hold of another identity. Look at verse 5, he says, For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God. What an intoxicating idea, that somehow eating a little piece of fruit, a created thing, could make her like the one that created it and her. When the devil told Eve that she would be like God, knowing good and evil, he wasn't telling her the truth. You could read that and assume that he

is offering a pathway to righteousness or holiness, but that's not really what he's hinting at here.

God being God, knows good and evil because he knows everything. So in a sense, her eating from the tree would give her a knowledge of good and evil that she did not have. But what the devil did not tell her is that she would not know good and evil and the same way that God does. Because she would know good and, she would know he would evil experientially. What do I mean by that? God is holy. He has never, and will, will never know evil from personal experience. He only knows goodness this way. He knows evil like a doctor might know cancer, something that he fully understands, but as something that is totally outside of himself. But when Eve disobeyed the commandment of God, she did not get the opportunity to know evil, like a doctor knows cancer, but she got to know evil like a patient knows cancer. She would not be the physician. She would become the one who is sick. It is in this deception that she didn't realize that by sinning against God, she would actually become inherently unlike God, because this evil would not be outside of her. It would not be somewhere over there, it would be in her. And, in it being in her, and in her husband, the image that they are made in would be blurred. You would see the image of God, marred by expressions of sin, which inevitably would take the glory that God intended to get out of humanity and put all of that glory that he deserved into the hands of people that had never even belonged to.

And this same deception is in us. Even though we are still very much image-bearers of living God, when we were born into this world, were born as sinners who sin against the living God. This is our competing identity. It is always attempting to shape who we think we are. When we are deceived, we go about life gathering information from ourselves, from everyone, but God. I am who this relationship says, I am. I am what my bank statement says, I am. I went to an Ivy League school, so my personhood is centered around my intelligence. I have children, so everything that I do, all that I am finds its completion in me being a mother. I am over 35 and still single, so I must not be worthy of love. I've been married for 25 years and my husband still hasn't changed, I deserve another spouse. We allow our life stages and difficulties and the accomplishments and blessings to be become the things that name us, but it ought not be so. The good things that God has given us and the hard things that God has taken us through are not the bases of our personhood.

Sin wants you and me to listen to what everyone else has to say about who we think we are and who we should be, just as Satan did to Eve in the garden. He dangled the

possibility of her being someone else before her heart, and do you know why she took it? It's not mainly because she forgot who she was. She didn't sin because she wasn't looking at herself or because she didn't know herself or because she had low self esteem or because she needs to read another book to tell her how great she is. If anything, her esteem was too high. She sinned because she stopped believing the truth of who God was. So many of the popular books and podcasts and personalities of our day will tell you that how you find wholeness is by looking inward, that how you find purpose is by serving yourself.

But, how you find, but they'll tell you that about how you find your identity is by telling yourself who you should be and what you should do. But when assessing the human heart in light of Scripture, we'll find actually that the heart, which controls how we think and what we do is pretty deceitful, above all things who could desperately know it, that's what Jeremiah said. So that tells me that, I'm not wise enough to look to myself for counsel on myself. I'm not considerate enough, even, to look to myself to encourage myself. I'm not honest enough to expect myself to even be all the way honest with myself. Jackie is not the right candidate to tell Jackie who Jackie is ,because I did not make me. We don't find out about ourselves by looking to ourselves. We find out who we are by looking and learning about the one that we were made for.

If Eve would have remembered that God was the one to be desired, to make one wise, that God was pleasurable to the sight, that God would satisfy the body, that before anything was made, God was here. So having a right theology about God would have reminded her that if he is everything, then a created thing can't possibly make her whole or wise or good. And if he is eternal, she is not. And if she's not, there's nothing she could do to become him. It is the faith that comes by looking to Christ that makes us men and women that are satisfied with being exactly what we were created to be. And that is namely his.

So where do we go? To find out the truth of who we are? We go to God. As you look to God to tell you who you are, remind yourself that it is Christ who is actually the exact image of the invisible God. If you have seen Christ, you have seen the Father because they are one. And it is this Christ who being God in the flesh who could not blur God's glory. He was and is the sinless one. So not once would you look at him and see sin. For what's God or people, even though we all have used our tongues and our tweets to both bless and curse, he became like a lamb who was led to the slaughter. He did not open up his mouth, but he remained silent. He did not need

people to tell him who he was because he knew who he was and what he came to do. And that was not to save the righteous. The folk that think they are just as good as God, that that works will give them a righteous identity. But no, he came to call centers to repentance people who were made in his image yet living like the devil. And that's all of us, by the way. It's in our repentance and our turning from all of the lies that we have allowed to define us and turning towards God, in faith, believing in all the truths that describe him, that sets us free. Because the Bible says that where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom.

The next verse also says this. And we all with unveiled face beholding, not the three of us, but the glory of God, are being transformed from into the same image from one degree of glory to another. So if you need more reminders, what has God said about you? He says that you are a child of God. He says that you are a friend of God. He says, that you are justified by God. He said, and you are a fellow heir with Christ. He says that you are a saint. He says, that you are a new creature in Christ. He says, that you have been made one with Christ. He says, that you are no longer a slave, that you have been set free in Christ, that you have been made alive in Christ, that you are God's workmanship, that you are a member of God's body, that you are light in the Lord. You have been raised up with Christ and that you are loved in Christ, this is all in the Scriptures, by the way. God is restoring his image in us. So it doesn't matter what society says you are, what your flesh says you are. Even with some of your parents said that you are. If you a black person, don't let America tell you who you are. Cause if we go to them for how we understand ourselves, we might tend to believe that we are less than, but we all need to go back to the Scriptures, and allow them to shape us. It does not matter who people say that you are or who you even think you are. What matters is, do you know who God is? And if you do, believe him when he tells you who you should be. Thank you for having me. I pray that that encourages you.