



360 DISCUSSION 10.16.16

## BEING THE CHURCH



One of the strangest films ever was the cult classic “Being John Malkovich.” A New York City file clerk discovers a portal in a dusty storage room that leads him into the mind of John Malkovich. After spending fifteen minutes inside the head of John Malkovich he hatches a scheme to sell tickets for the experience of being John Malkovich.

What a crazy movie! It’s hard to image anyone would want to be John Malkovich, or was even vaguely interested in what it was like to be John Malkovich, even for fifteen minutes.

I hope we feel differently about “Being the Church.” For some of us it is hard to think of church as something we are, rather than something we do or something we are a part of, or something we attend. But Paul tells us being the church is part of our response to the gospel.

For Paul to be in Christ is to be in the church and being the church was the core of what it meant to be in Christ.

In Romans 12, Paul moves from a vivid explanation of the gospel, to a practical application of the gospel. His application involves living in community with other believers for the sake of gospel and the world.

According to Paul being the church involves giving ourselves fully to Christ; giving ourselves fully to one another; and giving ourselves fully to the continuing work of God’s grace in our lives for the sake of the church and the world.

## GIVING OURSELVES FULLY TO GOD (vv. 1-2)

1. The phrase, “I urge you therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy...” serves as one of the most substantial literary bridges in the New Testament. Paul has given us vivid account of the gospel in chapters 1-11, and now he turns to a detailed application of the gospel in chapters 12-16. The overarching application is “offer yourselves to God,” but Paul’s opening line is all about motive. He doesn’t want us serving God out of a sense of duty or a sense of fear, but out of a sense of gratitude.
  - a. Why does Paul want us to respond to the gospel with a heart of gratitude rather than out of duty or fear?
  - b. What happens when our primary motive is “duty?”
  - c. What happens when our primary motive is “fear”?
  - d. How do we maintain our joy and gratitude in serving Christ?
2. In the Old Testament there were several different sacrifices. One was a sin offering, where the victim was offered to atone for the sins of either the individual or the community. Another was a “whole burnt offering,” where one offered the very best of the produce of the field or flock. The sacrifice was completely consumed as an act of devotion to God. God presented Christ as a sin offering for us. What does it mean for us to present ourselves to God as a “whole burnt offering?”
3. Paul further instructs us not to be conformed to the pattern of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our mind.
  - a. Why does one need a renewed mind in order to discern the beauty and perfection of God’s will?
  - b. How would you describe the difference between being conformed to the pattern of this world and being transformed by the renewing of the mind?
4. What are some of the things that may need to change about how we view others?

## GIVING OURSELVES FULLY TO ONE ANOTHER (vv. 3-8)

As our minds are continually renewed in Christ, we begin to think differently about ourselves, the church and our spiritual gifts.

1. Why is the Body of Christ a particularly powerful way to refer to the church?
2. How does thinking of the church as a body change the way you think about the church?
3. What are some attitudes we bring to the table that are detrimental to the overall health and vitality of the body of Christ?
4. What are some attitudes we can cultivate that contribute to the overall health and vitality of the body?
5. Why is it important that we use our gifts in serving the body of Christ?

## GIVING OURSELVES FULLY TO GRACE (vv. 9-21)

By a strict count Paul gives us 29 rapid fire commands in verses 9-21. In effect he is giving us some of the characteristics that flow from offering ourselves to God, being transformed by the renewing of our mind, and not thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought. Lists like these can encourage us in areas where we are seeing growth, and point out areas of our lives where we need continued growth. These are not only characteristics we find in Christ, they are the very characteristics Christ desires to produce in us. They give us a vision of the kind of people we need to be in order to be the kind of church we need to be. These lists are not meant to motivate us try harder, but to draw closer to Christ and allow His Spirit to produce these qualities in our lives.

1. What are some things in this list that do not come easy for you?
2. What is the danger of trying to produce the qualities in this list in your own strength (i.e. conforming rather than being transformed)?
3. What is a healthy gospel centered way to approach a list like this one?