

Puzzle Principles

Divine Design – Finding Your Fit in the Body of Christ – Part II

Romans 12:4-6

Introduction

This past week, I was invited to play golf with three other staff members at our church. So I enjoyed playing golf with Brad Harbaugh, Don Sandberg, and David Loftis – the only man among us who could play golf.

This was a diversion I had not had for nearly a year, so my wife said, “Honey, you need to do something different; you need to go.”

I went out to the shed, found my clubs, and met the guys at Knight’s Play – a very nice par three course. It is easier than the long holes of most golf courses, but still challenging enough for people like me.

On the first hole, Don Sandberg teed up and hit the ball. It immediately curved and went into the woods. I thought, “I like this guy . . . a lot.” I believe he got a six on that hole, and only because we set a limit.

On the next tee, Don hit the ball very high and straight. In fact, it landed right next to the pin – about ninety yards away. Then, it took a little spin sideways – and went right into the cup! It was a hole in one!

I had never seen that happen before in person. None of us had. People play golf their entire lives and dream of that hole in one, but never experience it. We laughed and shouted until we were hoarse.

On the next hole, Don proceeded to hit a six.

On the next hole, we could not see the cup, as it was located behind a small hill. Don whacked at the ball and we saw it bounce on the hill and disappear over the ridge. We eventually walked toward the

green and looked around for his ball, but could not find it. David said, “Just for kicks, I’m going to look in the cup.”

The next thing we knew, David was falling down in front of the pin, laughing in disbelief. Don’s ball was in the cup! Two times, in less than thirty minutes, a hole in one!

Don said to us, “Guys, this really doesn’t matter. I’m no good and I’m probably not going to play again for a long time.”

I knew he had some avid golf fans in his family, so I asked, “Are you going to tell your family?”

He replied, “No, because they’ll probably ask me to play, and I don’t want to.”

Even though Don does not care, we are now calling him, around the office, “Don One”!

Imagine experiencing what thousands of men and women would love to experience, and make sure they are written up in the newspaper because of it, but knowing, in the end, even though it was a lot of fun, it really did not matter if you shot a one or a six.

One of the great discoveries of life is the discovery of what really matters. In fact, in case you have not caught on to this fact, you happen to be on planet earth by divine design. If you think you are just here to . . .

- get through school;
- get a good job and pay the bills;
- maybe get married;
- somehow feed your family;
- put your kids through college;

- save enough for retirement so you can collect seashells or play games;
- wait for either the rapture or the undertaker,
... then life is really about you, right?

And all the while, Madison Avenue bombards you with ever increasing things that you must have to really live. Television and radio persistently advocate a message of individualism; a message that life revolves around your needs, your desires, your wants, your world. Your peers define life by what they drive or live in or vacation to or invest in. And even though all of that is the nature of our culture, mankind discovers that it really does not matter.

The question is, “What does matter?!”

I invite you back to the puzzle table for further instruction from the apostle Paul on how to put it together.

In our last session, we barely opened the box in Romans, chapter 12, to look at the pieces. Instead, we began to look at the process of what it takes to put the puzzle together. This puzzle is called life as it relates to the New Testament church.

It did not take us very long to discover a divine design not only for the church, but for our own lives as well. And it has nothing to do with what you have, what you drive, or where you live; it has everything to do with who you are and what God has already given to you.

In Romans, chapter 12, verse 3, Paul informs us that we cannot discover our fit in the family without having a radical change in thinking. In fact, he implies that you will not fit into the puzzle without humility. Notice in verse 3, Paul writes,

For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think . . .

In other words, do not carry around an attitude of superiority. You cannot have the attitude that you are more important than other pieces in the puzzle.

I read an article that was originally published in the *Chicago Tribune* several months ago. German orchestra violinists are in the process of suing for a pay raise to exceed the raise given to those members who play the flute, oboe, or trombone. The reason? These sixteen violinists have determined that they play many more notes per concert than their colleagues and deserve to be paid more. The director of the *Beethoven Orchestra* in Bonn, Germany, argued that they should not be paid more, since everyone understands that even if you play more

notes than someone else, every note is needed to play the music the composer created.¹

What a classic illustration of the destructive attitude of superiority. Can you imagine how the rest of the orchestra feels about the violinists now? Camaraderie is gone. There is no doubt that this orchestra will have difficulty playing with the composer’s passion and design.

In the same way in the church, no one is more important than anyone else. Stop keeping track of notes – we simply follow the Conductor. Similarly, we do not boast or glory in our placement in the puzzle – we simply surrender to the Designer.

So, before we even begin to work on the puzzle pieces, Paul very clearly warns us that we are probably going to need an attitude adjustment before we even start!

“Puzzle Principles” God’s Divine Design for the Church

There is more that Paul wants us to understand. He goes on in the next three verses of Romans, chapter 12, to deliver what I will summarize in three principles. This is God’s divine design for the church in the first century through this twenty-first century.

Maintain the principle of unity

1. Principle number one is that we are to maintain the principle of unity.

Paul writes in verses 4a and 5a of Romans, chapter 12,

For just as we have many members in one body . . . so we, who are many, are one body in Christ . . .

God never repeats Himself because He is at a loss for words. Twice in these verses, He inserts the phrase “one body”.

The church universal, no matter what continent you live on or what generation you live in during this grand dispensation of grace, which is now two thousand years old, is one body; one bride in Christ.

The church local, which is also fashioned by Christ and held accountable to operate in submission to Christ to effectively reach its world, is unique in its own personality and opportunity as God so determines.

For further study, you might want to ransack Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, for truth about the

unique ministry and personality of individual local churches. They were required to love one another, seize opportunity for ministry, pursue purity, defend the faith, and serve Christ in their particular world.

At all costs, maintain the principle of unity in the local church.

Paul would stress this principle over and over as he wrote to the churches of Asia Minor.

To the Colossian believers he wrote,

. . . as those who have been chosen of God . . . put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;

bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body [one puzzle – that is my paraphrase!] . . . (Colossians 3:12-15)

To the Ephesian church, Paul wrote,

. . . I . . . implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,

with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,

being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

The writer of Hebrews challenged the church to place their unity in truth and love at a high premium! He writes in Hebrews, chapter 10, verse 24 (KJV),

. . . let us consider one another to provoke . . .

(You might say, “Stop there! That’s me! I know how to provoke people. I’ve got the gift of provocation.” No, the writer is not finished.)

. . . let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works:

How? Continue to verse 25.

not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is . . .

We are all to contribute to the love and unity of the church by making a habit of assembling together.

It is in the assembly that we practice unity! None are exempt from making a contribution.

I read one author who wrote with mischievous humor, that some of God’s people have a joy that is so deep, it never rises to the surface!

Someone might say, “Oh, that Christian is so deep.”

However, they might actually be saying, “That Christian is ornery.”

That reminds me of H. A. Ironside, who pastored Moody church years ago and was a best selling author of biblical studies and books. He once admitted that he prayed every day, “Oh Lord, help me not become an ornery old man.”

Spiritual gifts are ways of bringing joy, blessing, and unity to the body. They are not toys to play with; they are not personal treasure to keep to ourselves; they are not weapons to fight one another with, they are tools to build the unity of the body.

Let us admit something. The truth is, we are naturally divisive. We easily separate. We tend to criticize. We like to gossip. We do not find it easy to give anyone the benefit of the doubt.

Apart from the work of Christ in our midst, we would never stay together; no church would ever last. Unity is like fine china – it is beautiful, but fragile. It must be reinforced and protected.

That is why Paul issues this challenge as he begins to address the church. He tells us to do our part, as a piece of the puzzle, to maintain the principle of unity.

That leads me to the second principle.

Strengthen the principle of family

2. Principle number two is that we are to strengthen the principle of family.

I find it interesting that even though Paul has already stressed the fact that we are one in the body of Christ, he then says it in another way that is even more challenging. It is easy to miss, in fact. Look at the phrase in the latter part of verse 5 of Romans, chapter 12.

. . . we . . . are . . . individually members of one of another.

It is easy to overlook this because it is harder to accept, right? It is one thing to say, “I belong to Jesus Christ,” but it is another to say, “I belong to you.” It is one thing to say, “I’m related to God by faith in Christ,” but it is another entirely to say, “I’m related

to you too.” However, that is exactly what Paul means.

If you ask the average Christian for their list of priorities, they will rattle off,

- God,
- my family,
- my career.

Then they will look at you as if they are something.

The older I get, the bolder I get, so now, I just ask them, “Which family? You have:

- God first,
- then your family,
- then lastly, your career.

What is missing?!”

I assume by “family,” you mean immediate family members. So, where is your spiritual family? Are they on the list?

In the book of Ephesians, Paul clearly teaches the responsibility and priority of the nuclear family. The husband and wife are to reflect the truth of Christ for His church and children are to honor their parents – all of which is glorifying to God.

In the book of Romans, Paul is teaching the relationship and priority of the spiritual family; the living church. With equal passion, they are to serve one another, build one another up, edify and instruct one another in the faith.

In Ephesians, there is the priority of a biological relationship.

In Romans, there is the priority of a spiritual relationship.

Has it ever occurred to you that the spiritual will live beyond the biological? In fact, when you leave planet earth, as the bride of Christ, your husband will be Jesus Christ. The Son of God, your Bridegroom, has a place already prepared; a place for you in the Father’s house.

Ma’am, that means the husband you have on earth will not be your husband for eternity. Isn’t that a relief?

You are the bride of Christ. That means that at this time, we are all related by faith in the Bridegroom.

It should not surprise us then that the apostle Paul actually tells us to relate to one another as members of the same family.

He gave Timothy this advice,

Respond to older men as fathers; treat younger men as brothers; treat the older women as mothers and act in purity toward the younger women as your own sisters. (1 Timothy 5:1-2 paraphrased)

Would that not revolutionize the way we act in church? That would change the way you would treat younger men who are filled with questions; the way you would treat a young woman on a date; the way you would treat older women and listen to older men.

This is the picture on the puzzle box; this is what it looks like. We are:

- to pursue the principle of unity;
- to strengthen the principle of family.

Allow for the principle of diversity

3. Principle number three is a challenge from Paul to us to allow for the principle of diversity.

I am not referring to doctrinal diversity, but practical diversity within the body.

Paul writes in verse 6 of Romans, chapter 12,

. . . we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us . . .

If the first principle was hard to swallow, this one will only go down with a lot of sugar. It is like the way I drink my coffee. I do not like the taste of coffee, but I like something hot to drink that keeps me awake. So I pour on the sugar and extra cream in order to swallow it. For me, coffee is dessert in a cup.

The taste of diversity is probably too strong for the average Christian. We tend to avoid people that are not like us. We naturally hang around people who like the same things; have the same interests; are in a similar station in life; come to the same conclusions.

In the recent national basketball championship, for example, we either hung around people who celebrated the University of North Carolina’s win, or we hung around people who did not celebrate.

We get along with people who vote the same way we vote. There are people who voted for President Bush and there are people who voted for the other guy. There are people wishing Rush Limbaugh would run for office.

Then we come to church. And we often make the mistake of thinking that “church” means we all conform to one another. That is why you can walk

into the average church today, and everybody looks alike; dresses alike; talks alike; reads the same books; watches the same programs; listens to the same kind of music; goes to the same schools or chooses to homeschool. Churches divide over these issues.

Let me say this – my wife and I have had our children in public school, we have homeschooled, and we have had them in Christian school too. None of them work . . . perfectly! Every year we follow what we believe to be the Lord’s leading for us.

However, the average church today, would say that if you decide all of that stuff in the same way, then you are operating in unity!

Ladies and gentlemen, there is a vast difference between unity and uniformity. Uniformity forbids diversity. Unity, as we will discover in this passage, allows for the principle of diversity.

I am not talking about doctrine! I am talking about function.

God purposefully chose not to make us in the way that General Motors makes Buicks. We are different and unique; built with different features and capabilities.

To wish to be like someone else is actually to discredit the wisdom of God, since He was the one who put you together to begin with! If you are a Buick, then be a Buick. You are going to have electrical problems, so just be patient. If you are a Chevy pickup, do not be too proud about it, stay humble. There is room in the garage for everyone.

Notice how Paul puts it in the last part of verse 4 and the first part of verse 6.

. . . all the members do not have the same function, . . . we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us . . .

By the way, this does not mean that some have more grace than others. Paul means that because of God’s grace, we all have been given our unique and different gifts.

God sovereignly bestowed on you and me the equipment to serve Him and His church. In fact, the New Testament tells us that every member of the Godhead was involved in giving believers spiritual gifts. It was:

- God the Father in Romans, chapter 12;
- God the Son in Ephesians, chapter 4;
- God the Spirit in I Corinthians, chapter 12.

Peter wrote it this way,

As each one of you has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. (I Peter 4:10)

Think of that! Should it not stagger our minds that God knew from eternity past that you would not only become a member of the Bride, but how you would contribute to the Body?

Let me make it even more personal than that. Before the world began, God knew what this church, in this generation, in this city, in this hour would need, and He chose you and gifted you to add something to the puzzle picture of His grace.

Brad Estep, from St. Petersburg, Florida, told the story of Jamie Scott. Jamie tried out for the play at his elementary school. He had his heart set on being one of the characters in the play, but his mother knew better. He was not the most outgoing personality and was sometimes reserved and quiet. She feared that he would be crushed when he learned that he had not been chosen to play one of the characters. On the day the parts were awarded to the children, Jamie’s mother and one of his friends went along to pick him up, just in case he was crushed by the disappointment. When Jamie saw his mother, he rushed over to her, his eyes shining with excitement, and said, “Guess what, Mom, I have been chosen to clap and to cheer.”

Oh that we would all find similar joy in what God has chosen for us to do. Why? Because before you ever discover the character you are to play in the body, it is as if Paul wants us to know we have all been chosen to clap.

Conclusion

We are all members one of another. That is something that really matters – more than making a hole in one twice in the same game.

In order for that perspective to take place in this family, we are going to have to:

- allow for the principle of diversity;
- reinforce the principle of family;
- pursue the principle of unity.

That is all a part of God’s divine design as we, together, reveal to our world the puzzle picture of the family of God – the living, breathing, serving, diversified yet unified church of Jesus Christ. And thus, reveal to the world a picture of the grace of God.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/1/2005 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ“Violinists Say Pay Far From Noteworthy,” 3/04, <http://www.preachingtoday.com>, 2005, Chicago Tribune.