

Solving Rubik's Puzzle

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

Romans 12:3-8

Introduction

In light of our current study on the subject of finding your fit in the body of Christ; finding your place in the puzzle, I have spent some time researching puzzles – their use and popularity, not only in American history, but in world history. I have, as a result, had my definition of “puzzle” greatly expanded.

I have discovered puzzles with moving parts; puzzles in the shapes of animals, ships and boats; round puzzles, square puzzles, and puzzles that stack into miniature buildings. I have even found puzzles that glow in the dark.

In this process, I came across the story of the most famous puzzle of all time. It is a puzzle with moving parts that has literally, millions of possible moves. This particular puzzle is named after its Hungarian inventor, Mr. Erno Rubik. The Rubik's cube has become so globally popular, in fact, that one eighth of the world's population has purchased one.

Each side of the cube, which fits in one hand, has its own color. The cube is divided into three rows or layers, and each layer is divided into nine cubes. Each row or layer can be turned horizontally or vertically. The challenge is to twist and turn the layers until the different colored cubes are mixed, and then, return the cube to its original design, with all the colors matching on all six sides.

I can remember trying this puzzle myself in high school . . . and failing. Five hundred million other people have tried as well.

Did you know there are clubs in numerous countries that are devoted to solving the puzzles of

the cube? There are internet sites, chat rooms, and contests as well. I found pages and pages of diagrams, instructions, shortcuts, advice, analysis, special moves and turns to solve problem positions, including discussions on algorithms or mathematical formulas for solving problems.

Since I barely got a “D-” in high school algebra, you can imagine why I did not join the club.

I found it interesting that Erno Rubik never planned to invent the best selling toy puzzle in history. It was the structural design that intrigued this professor of Applied Arts and Design. He wanted to create something with many blocks which could move independently without falling apart.

So, in 1974, Rubik hand carved little wooden blocks and assembled them together, marking each one with a different color. When he first twisted the cube and mixed the colors, it took him a month to return it to its original position.

The world record for returning Rubik's cube to its original position was accomplished in 1982. A Vietnamese student solved the puzzle in 22.9 seconds. That record still stands, even though there is an international competition held in the hometown of Erno Rubik every year.

To this day, no one has solved the puzzle in less than fifty-two moves, although computer analysis suggests it can be solved in only twenty-two moves. Cube experts agree, however, that it would require omniscience to do it in only twenty-two moves. It would require that all the possible millions of potential moves would have to be known at once, and no move could be wasted.

Today, more than five million cubes have been sold around the world. This year, by the way, marks the thirtieth anniversary of what has been called, the best known puzzle in the world.¹

On that point I would kindly disagree. The best known puzzle in the world today, having been in existence not for thirty years, but for nearly two thousand, is the body of Christ; that is, the church of our living Lord. There are millions of moving parts in that “puzzle” – all of which are fitted together in one Body.

However, on this I would agree – Rubik’s cube experts have calculated that it would require an omniscient being to put the puzzle together in twenty-two moves. It would require some all-knowing being who could know all of the possible scenarios and options; someone who would know where each individual piece is located at any given time, after every possible move.

In the same way, the greatest, most globally practiced puzzle of all – the church – requires an omniscient Being who knows where every member of the puzzle is at any given time. It requires One who knows all the possible millions of potential moves any one of us could contribute to the Body, without any move being wasted.

The inventor of this puzzle was not a Hungarian, or an American, but a Galilean Jew – God in the flesh. To this day, according to His promise, He is building His church, putting all of the pieces of the puzzle together, “. . . and the gates of Hades,” He promised, will fail in every attempt to destroy it (Matthew 16:18).

In our last session, we talked about the universal church which comprises all believers from the day of Pentecost, which was the birthday of the church, to today. This church is invisible to us, since it includes every Christian from the past twenty centuries and in the beginning of the twenty-first.

Then there is the local church – the church at Jerusalem; the church at Antioch, and the churches that spread beyond those and around the world. This includes, even to this day, a local church assembling at our location on Tryon Road in Cary, North Carolina.

The buildings are not the church, however. The church is all the moving parts – with millions of options and possibilities. The New Testament tells us that:

- there are offices of authority to follow (I Timothy 3);

- there is order to respect (I Corinthians 14);
- there is doctrine to teach and defend (Titus 1);
- there are gifts to be exercised (Romans 12);
- there is a mission to fulfill (I Corinthians 15);
- there are relationships to develop (Ephesians 4);
- there are dangers and false teaching to avoid (Acts 20);
- there are funds to invest in God’s work (II Corinthians 8);
- there are ordinances to practice (Matthew 28; I Corinthians 11);
- there are, unique to every congregation, opportunities to seize (Revelation 2-3).

And that is just the beginning of what we do around the church.

So the question for the believer is not, “Do I really need the church?” but, “How can I live without it?”

Since the church is God’s primary instrument in both developing the believer and reaching the world, isn’t the question, “Okay, where do I sign on? Where can I find my place in this magnificent puzzle?”

Then, we should all ask, “How do we fit together in this puzzle – this local assembly which has been divinely designed by the Puzzle Master, the Lord Jesus Christ?”

Solving the Believer’s Place in the Church “Puzzle”

The apostle Paul is in the process of answering that question of our place in the church puzzle in Romans, chapter 12. And he is doing it much faster than I am! In fact, today we will merely continue the process of setting up the puzzle table.

Attitude of humility

1. We have already been encouraged by Paul to approach this subject with an attitude of humility.

Paul writes, in verse 3, that a believer is,

. . . not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think . . .

You cannot approach the puzzle of Christ’s church and discover your own place without this basic principle called humility.

Principle of unity

2. Paul then informs us that we are to maintain the principle of unity.

In verses 4 and 5, he twice repeats the expression,

... one body ...

It is as if to say, “Even though we consist of a lot of moving parts, we are one complete puzzle; our pieces interlock.”

Principle of diversity

3. Thirdly, we discovered the principle of diversity.

Paul says in verse 4,

For just as we have many members in one body . . . all the members do not have the same function,

Then in verse 6a, Paul adds,

Since we have gifts that differ . . .

In other words, a unified church is not a uniform church. Unity is not the same thing as uniformity, although much of the Christian world segments itself according to non-doctrinal traditions and preferences.

Principle of accountability

4. Fourthly, we uncovered the principle of accountability.

Paul says in verse 5b,

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

We belong to one another. We have a responsibility to each other. Every Christian is a blood relative – the blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed us and given us access into the family of God.

I ask again in this session, “Is there room in your life for the rest of us? Is there any time for us? Besides Sunday morning, does the church ever get on your to-do list?”

Principle of availability

5. If your answer is, “Yes,” to the question of accountability, and I believe Paul assumed it would be, he now moves to the final

principle, which is the logical next step, and that is, the principle of availability.

This principle, in the last part of verse 6, is implied by the context and direction of Paul’s exhortation.

Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly . . .

In other words, assuming there is a desire to serve, now there needs to be the discovery of where to serve.

Paul gives a rather short list of possibilities. It is not exhaustive, but it is enough to get the Roman church, and every church since, plenty to think and pray about. Paul mentions in:

- verse 6, prophecy;
- verse 7, service and teaching;
- verse 8, exhortation, giving, leading, and showing mercy.

You can imagine that there are a million ways to exercise these gifts. It is as if Paul is drawn to the conclusion and says to each one of us, “Do something! Act!”

Do not read these verses and pass them off, they are meant to be practiced.

This is the picture on the puzzle box; this is what a church should look like, and here are the pieces.

Paul’s passion in these verses about the role of the individual believer is echoed in other passages and by other apostles.

Peter wrote,

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another . . . (I Peter 4:10)

Paul wrote to Timothy and strongly urged him,

Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you . . . (I Timothy 4:14)

Do not neglect it; do not ignore it; do not pack it away – use it!

Before Niccolo Paganini died, this world famous violinist and composer willed his personal violin to the Italian city of Genoa . It was willed under one condition, however, that it would never be played again. It had to be preserved – never played.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians that we, as believers, were created as Christ’s workmanship unto good works – we were literally composed for service

(Ephesians 2:10). In other words, we were meant to be played!

Ladies and gentlemen, Jesus Christ never called any of us to a life of preservation, but participation. In fact, Jesus Christ once startled potential disciples by saying,

If you want to lose your life, keep it to yourself; but if you want to find life, be prepared to give your life away. (Matthew 16:25 paraphrase)

We are not preserves – like my grandmother used to have in thick masonry jars sitting in the dark basement until some unknown day. We are basins of water, ready at the door for the first pair of dirty feet that happen to walk by.

So, before Paul talks about specific terms of ministry within the church, he spends time informing us of:

- how to approach one another;
- what we should pursue as we serve one another;
- why we should serve one another.

And now Paul asks:

- are we willing to serve one another?

That is in perfect order. Availability precedes opportunity.

The reason many Christians do not sense opportunity from God is because God already knows they are unavailable. They have hung on the door handle of their hearts, “Do not disturb.”

The Principle of Availability

Let us further explore this principle of availability.

If you want to obey Paul’s challenge, in verse 6 of Romans, chapter 12, to exercise your gift accordingly, you are going to need to be willing to do four things and you are going to have to refuse to do four things.

Challenges regarding your spiritual gift

Let me give several challenges regarding your spiritual gift.

Discover it!

1. If you are going to exercise your spiritual gift, then first, you are going to have to discover it!

How can we discover our spiritual gift? Let me give two key words to consider.

- The first key word is *exposure*.
 - There is exposure before God in prayer. This step never really ends. You find your gifted role in the body through prayer and you exercise your gift through prayer; under-girded with prayer, and empowered by prayer. Corrie ten Boom once asked the perceptive question, “Is prayer your steering wheel or spare tire?” Pray!
 - There is exposure before the word for insight. If you stay distant from the word of God, you will never feel close to the family of God! If you want to find your fit in the family of God, you must spend time in the word of God.
 - There is exposure before others for counsel. Let others affirm and encourage your choice of ministry avenue.

Expose yourself to the opportunities and then, pray with the facts in front of you, search the scriptures for insight and direction, and talk to others about your leaning, your struggle, your search.

- The second key word is *experimentation*.

I found it interesting that a well known author on the subject of spiritual gifts has come to a place in which he recently wrote that after twenty-five years of giving all sorts of guidelines on discovering and utilizing your spiritual gifts, he has come to the conclusion that the best advice he can give a believer who is walking with Christ and desiring to be used of the Lord, is this one word – experiment.

What do you think you would like to do? What do you enjoy doing? Where has God blessed your efforts?

That does not mean it is all roses. We will talk about that in a minute.

This fits well with what we discovered in Romans, chapter 12, verse 2. Follow after God – stay in His word, pursue purity, seek to please Him – then, do whatever you would like to do!

If you are not sure where to start at this church, call us. Sit down and talk to one of our Next Step

Counselors who have notebooks filled with ministry opportunities.

Did you know that we have one hundred eleven ministries actively serving Christ, not only here at our church, but in the community? One hundred eleven ministries which require 2,058 volunteers to pull off!

I e-mailed every department and asked them for some of these 2,058 jobs. They sent back some of the more obscure, out of the spotlight ministry services. These include:

- The volunteer who regularly clips coupons and organizes them for families in need of cost saving measures;
- The volunteers who have come in for months to do nothing more than roll pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters;
- The mother and her two daughters who come in once a week to gather all the things left at the church and store them in cabinets for the pastoral staff – I mean, the lost and found (I will admit, I have rarely had to buy an umbrella. Go over there and look at the stacks of clothing, dishes, rings, earrings, toys, books, shoes – whatever you bought your kids last Christmas, it is over there!).

There are 2,058 pieces of the puzzle who found their fit!

Discover your fit through exposure and experimentation.

Develop it!

2. The second challenge that emanates from Paul's exhortation to exercise your gift accordingly is that not only are you to discover it, you are to develop it!

I am afraid that many Christians have the idea that finding your spiritual gift includes only those things which come easily – with no effort, or discipline, or practice, or study, or research, or development. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The truth is, a gift is not so much a ready-made ability to perform, but rather a capacity for service that must be developed.ⁱⁱ

It is going to take time and effort to contribute that particular piece to the puzzle.

Discover your gift. Develop your gift.

Delight in it!

3. The third challenge is to delight in it!

God has specifically designed you to make a contribution.

There are few things that you come in contact with that will last forever, but people do! Your gift is the primary avenue through which you connect people to the grace of God.

Remember, Peter said,

Through our spiritual gifts we are stewarding – dispensing – the manifold grace of God to others. (I Peter 4:10 paraphrase)

This is how your life experiences, both good and bad, your passion, personality, education, and spiritual interests come together, and through your placement in the Body, you effectively serve the Body and bring glory to God.

The apostle John faithfully taught, evangelized, and disciplined new believers for years. He wrote,

I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth. (III John 4)

He did not say, "I have no greater joy than to know I'm one of the twelve apostles." or "I have no greater joy than to know that I've written five books in the New Testament."

You do not sit around and admire yourself, you admire God and thank Him for what His divine design in your own life has allowed you to do in the lives of others – the lives you teach, reach, encourage, confront, evangelize, restore, disciple, intercede for, and give to.

Discover it. Develop it. Delight in it.

Do not despair because of it!

4. The fourth challenge is, do not despair because of it!

People will bring to you your greatest joy and they will bring to you your greatest sorrow.

Will you serve them? Will you,

. . . not grow weary of doing good (II Thessalonians 3:13)?

Every dedicated servant of Christ knows the wilderness of serving. When that person you tried to help went right back to their destructive, sinful lifestyle, you thought, "What's the use? People don't

change; they don't care. This is difficult, lonely, and sometimes just plain drudgery."

Ask yourself:

- Will you be content with the promise of Christ that,
... your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you (Matthew 6:4)?
- Will you cling to the promise that,
... your toil is not in vain in the Lord (I Corinthians 15:58)?
- Are you willing to serve Christ, and not care who gets the credit?
- Are you willing to fail at some attempt to serve, without giving up completely?
- Are you available to keep experimenting, praying, searching, studying, and adapting to change and growth?

I love the story of the little five year old boy who was in his backyard. He had his baseball cap on, his baseball knickers on, and his socks pulled up to his kneecaps. He had his plastic bat and plastic ball. You can just imagine him as he practiced in his backyard. His mother overheard him as he announced, "I am the *greatest hitter* in the world."

He threw the ball up in the air, swung the bat, and missed the ball completely. He said aloud, "Strike one."

He picked the ball up and said a little louder, "I am the greatest hitter in the world."

He threw the ball up again, swung, and again, missed the ball. He said, "Strike two."

He stopped to examine his bat. Guys learn early to blame their equipment. He retrieved the ball and said with determination, "I am the greatest hitter in the world."

He threw the ball up a little higher than before, got set, and then swung the bat with all his might. He missed. "Strike three," he said, and then added, "I am the *greatest pitcher* in the world."

Oh that we would adapt so easily. We might dream of being a power hitter for God, but God wants instead, for us to:

- be a pitcher,
- sit on the bench and keep the stats,
- join the training squad,
- wash the uniforms,

- purchase the equipment,
- rake the infield,
- mow the outfield.

All of it is necessary to pull off the game.

That leads me to toss in one more challenge.

Do it!

5. The fifth challenge is a well worn phrase, but you can hear it in the middle of Romans, chapter 12, verse 6,

... each of us is to exercise [our gift] accordingly ...

In other words, "Don't just stand there ... or sit there ... do something! Just do it!"

You might say, "Well I won't do anything until I discover my gift."

As one author wrote, tongue in cheek, but we can get the point, "Even God can't steer a parked car."

Put it in first gear; look around; make an appointment; make a phone call or two; open your eyes. There are so many things that can be done in a growing family of believers. We do not need to sit around and wait for someone to feel gifted.

When you are walking down the church corridor and you see some trash on the floor, do not ask, "Do I have the gift of service?" – pick it up!

If you see a child walking down the hallway crying, obviously lost and separated from his family, do not ask yourself, "Do I have the gift of mercy?" – just help!

If you hand your child to the Sunday school teacher, only to discover a room full of kindergartners and a teaching staff that is unexpectedly shorthanded because two assistants are out sick; you do not need to hold a prayer rally in the hallway asking God for more gifted teachers. Roll up your sleeves and dive into the wiggling mass of future leaders.

You just might have the time of your life! It might be that act of availability that leads to discovery.

There is no telling what you will learn from all those children. From what I hear, children seldom misquote their parents in Sunday school. In fact, they usually repeat word for word the things their parents said. They make up stuff too, just for fun!

When my oldest daughter, who is now eighteen, was in her four year old Sunday school class at this

church, the teacher was going around the room asking for prayer requests. When the teacher got to her, my daughter said, “Pray for my Daddy, he’s got a drinking problem.”

I have no idea where she got that from – to this day, it is a mystery. The teacher said, “Excuse me?”

“Oh yea,” she said, “my Daddy’s got a drinking problem. We really need to pray for him.”

That was probably the highlight of that teacher’s career!

Conclusion

This is the principle of availability –

- Discover it!
- Develop it!
- Delight in it!
- Do not despair in it!
- Just do it!

What happens as a result?

As I read the articles on the Rubik’s cube, I found Mr. Rubik’s primary fascination that led to the

invention of the cube to be interesting. He had a desire to see an object with moving parts which could move independently, and yet, not fall apart.

Individual movement without disconnection. Moving parts without division. What a picture of the body of Christ – universal and local.

Moving parts – unified hearts. Independent actions with a thousand possibilities – but with a singular passion to glorify the Lord of the universe by building:

- a lighthouse;
- a center for learning;
- a training station for disciples;
- a resting place for the weary;
- a water fountain for the thirsty;
- and on and on and on.

Then, at special times like Sunday morning, when all the moving parts assemble, we worship together the One and only, true and living Savior, who is Jesus Christ our Lord!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/8/2005 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ “The History of Rubik’s Cube,” <http://inventors.about.com>.

ⁱⁱ Kenneth O. Gangel, You and Your Spiritual Gifts (Moody Press, 1975), p. 9.