A Jigsaw Puzzle

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon illustrates how each believer is a vital piece of God's jigsaw puzzle, emphasizing the importance of Christ's headship and the Holy Spirit's guidance in fitting together as one body in Christ.

Scripture: Ephesians 2:21, Ephesians 4:12
Topics: "Unity in the Body of Christ", "Purpose and Identity in Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks delivers a profound message to young Christians, likening the church to a jigsaw puzzle where each believer is a unique piece that fits into God's grand design. He emphasizes that every individual has a specific place and purpose within the body of Christ, and that true fulfillment comes from recognizing and accepting this role. Sparks highlights the importance of the headship of Christ in aligning believers and fostering unity, asserting that the Holy Spirit guides each person to their rightful position. He encourages Christians to embrace their experiences as part of God's intricate plan, ultimately leading to a complete and beautiful picture of the church. The sermon concludes with the hope that one day, believers will see the full design of God's work in their lives.

Transcript

A Message to Young Christians - and Others

"In whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:21).

"...for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ...but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ - from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love." (Eph 4:12-13, 15-16).

"And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." (Eph 1:22-23).

I suppose most of us have, at some time or another, fallen under the spell of a jigsaw puzzle. It is one of those things which get hold of you, and when you have started you do not want to give it up. It draws you on, and it is not the sort of thing you like to leave overnight to start on again in the morning. Well, here, in

what we have just read, we have God's great jigsaw puzzle, and when you put these different passages together, or read them together, you have got the original. It is an exceedingly difficult thing to come to a jigsaw puzzle without having the original, the picture of what you are going to make; you do not know what it amounts to at all. But here is the original, here is the perfect, unbroken picture. God made that picture it says here "before the world was"; and it is the picture of what? Well, that is what we are going to look at. But I would suggest to you that you do read these passages together again in order to see the original, and, as we come to it now, we find it all broken up into the jigsaw. That is to say, while the picture is here, when we come to the practical side of things, we find that it is all in pieces, all in fragments, large and small fragments, all apparently uneven and jagged, crooked pieces. The whole thing has been broken up; it is all a jumble.

The Original

The original is a very wonderful picture. Right at the centre of this picture is a Man - "A fullgrown man... the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ". That is right at the very centre of God's original picture. Then it says in the other passages that we are parts of that Man. I expect, if we saw the full picture, we would have to take in lots of things that are in the background. They are all scattered through the Old Testament, they are the background. There are sheep and lambs, and oxen, and goats, and doves, and priests, and kings, and prophets, and altars, and all these things are in the picture, in the background, and they all have something to do with that Man at the centre. They all in some way relate to that Man. I will not stay now to try to show how that is so, but some of us can at once see that the lambs of the Old Testament all have something to do with this central Figure, this Man Who Himself was called "The Lamb of God". We can see how the priests all pointed to Him, stand there in this great picture in relation to Him. Well, all that is a big, vast, comprehensive picture.

The Pieces

But we have said that we are here spoken of as parts of that Man. "Till we all attain... unto... the stature of the fullness of Christ". We are all parts of the Man, and that means that in this seeming great jumble of pieces, in God's great pattern and purpose every part has its place. We know that is true in the jigsaw puzzle. It may look a strange bit, but we know that every bit has its own place. It is no use trying to fit it somewhere else. How we have tried in our puzzles sometimes to get a piece to fit in where we wanted it to; but it would not, it did not belong. We have had to spend a lot of time to find the piece that fits just that place, and we have been compelled to recognise the fact that every bit has its place. It is no use trying to put it anywhere, it belongs to a certain place; and that is what is said here. "From whom ALL THE BODY FITLY FRAMED and knit together through that which every joint supplieth" (4:16). Every bit has its place. That is true of us. It is one of the great lessons we have to learn in our relationship to the Lord Jesus, in our Christian lives, that we have our place and we will not fit in anywhere else, and we will never be happy until we are really in our place. Let us learn that lesson. That is a truth which the Word of God teaches. Each bit in the great plan of God has its place. You have your place, and I have mine.

Fitting into Place

The next thing is this, that every bit is a problem until it is in its place. Notice what it says in the second half of that sixteenth verse of Chap. 4 - "according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body". Now in our puzzle we pick up a little bit, or several little bits, and we look at them, and they are a real problem to us. We cannot see what they mean, there is nothing complete on any

one bit. It may just be a little bit of blue, a little fragment of red, a little touch of green, and lots of angles, corners, a real problem in itself. And we are real problems in ourselves, but the problem disappears immediately when you get the piece into its place. We have no longer a problem when that bit has found its place. I would like to say a lot to older Christians about this, but I am trying to be as simple as I can. You must look at things beyond what I am saying. What a lot of problems there are about because people are not in their place, not fitting in. They WILL NOT fit in, perhaps. They are out of their place, and they are awkward and useless, and things are not at all easy. Let us remember that we shall be problems to ourselves and to others until our place is found where we belong. Each life has its place, and each one will be a problem until it is in its place, and that place has been accepted.

Each Piece Explanatory of the Other

Now another thing. Each several part makes an explanation for another part. That is a point not easy to grasp perhaps. Here are all these parts and each part can only be explained as you find another part that fits into it. That is to say, each part explains the other. Now, here is something with a certain mark on it. It may just be the finger of the hand, the toe of the foot. Now here is the other part which has some more of that foot or that hand, and neither of these can be explained until you get the complement, the other piece, to fit in there, so that each part explains the other.

And when the Lord, by His Spirit, does unite His people, bring them together in His own wonderful pattern, He does this; He makes one the complement of the other, He makes complete another or others by bringing that one into his or her place. And the Lord is seeking to bring His people together in a right way to be helps to one another. He is not having just a jumble of unrelated pieces or people. He is not just bringing them together like so many unrelated things. He is fitting in, so that you can really be a help to me and I can be a help to you. You have something to give to me, and I have something to give to you, and no one else can do just that. You may go right over a whole mass of pieces in a puzzle and you may not find more than a piece in the whole that will fit into a certain place. You may try to get another piece to fit in there, but it will not. It wants THIS piece to fit in THERE, to help THERE. It is like that with Christians. There is something that you may be able to give me, in which you can help me; no one else can do that. I may be able to help you in a way in which no one else can help you. The Lord has perhaps dealt with me in such a way, put me through such experiences, that I can help you - not more than another can help you, but in a way in which perhaps no one else can help you; and the same with one another.

Why does the Lord deal thus with us? - Why all this cutting about, and so many angles, nothing seeming to be straight in our experience? Why has the Lord dealt with us in this way? Why does the Lord single out experiences for us so different from most other peoples' experiences? Just to make us able to help somebody in a way that no one else can. We all have our particular usefulness to the Lord. How often we have had to say in our lives about certain people, Oh, So-and-so was able to help me as no one else had been able to do! So-and-so just had the experience or the word that I have been looking for; I have asked many, but they have never been able to help me! The Lord may be dealing with you and me in this strange way of carving-out, cutting about, this jigsaw business which is such a puzzle in our own experience, in order to fit us into the whole in such a way that we can help one another as no one else can. It says so here - "that which every joint supplieth"; "the whole body fitly framed and knit together through that which EVERY joint supplieth". Every bit of the puzzle maketh increase for the whole, and every bit for the other, not for itself.

Every Piece Necessary

Then, one more thing. Of course, every bit of this puzzle makes the other bits necessary. Until the thing is finished, until the thing is really completed, as you put the bit in its place what have you done? You have increased the fullness, got nearer to completeness, but you still have some angles. You have only made something more necessary. You say, Now I want this, I cannot get on until I have this! So that last bit has made this next bit necessary. The New Testament is full of this sort of thing. It speaks about how others are necessary to this whole. One is necessary to another, and each one is necessary to the whole. "The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee: or again the head to the feet, I have no need of you" (1 Cor. 12:21). We are all needed by one another, we make one another necessary, and the whole thing can never be complete until we have learned that. Some people think they are complete in themselves. That is not what the Bible teaches. Some people think if they are together in a little group, they are complete in themselves. Not at all! This is going to require the whole of that vast mass called "the church which is his body". None of us can ever know how big that is and how many pieces there are; and every one is needed by the other. That is what the Word teaches, and we are forbidden to have any such thought that we can do without anyone, can dispense with another. The Holy Spirit, speaking through Paul, says so clearly that the least member is necessary. It is a big lesson to learn; EACH PIECE MAKES THE OTHER NECESSARY.

The Key

Well now, what is the key to this puzzle? What do you do when you get a new jigsaw puzzle and you sit down to work it out? Well, in my little experience, I have always tried to get something that I think is the central thing or the most important thing in the whole picture, and have put that down, and worked to that. I usually sweep aside all the little bits of green and blue and get something distinctive. If I can get a man's face, I have something to work to; I know what will come round a face. You have to have the crown of his head, an ear, a neck. It is all right if you have something distinctive; and here it is "and gave him to be head over all things to the church which is his body". The key to everything is the headship of the Lord Jesus. We will never get fitted in until Jesus is in His place as Head; we will not fit in with Him or one another until He is Head, until He is Lord. It takes the lordship of Jesus to get us all into our place and our relationship with one another. If we are all jumbled and up against one another, awkward pieces, the thing to put us straight is to make Jesus Lord. If we really accept the lordship of Jesus, then that is going to have a working out in this way, that we get into line with one another. It is going to be hard. The Word says that you cannot say you love God and at the same time not love your brother (1 John 4:20). "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar". It cannot be done. If we love the Lord, we cannot be unloving toward one another. If He is Lord really in our hearts, then things will get straightened out between us and others. That must be so, that is what it says. So the key to the whole is the headship of the Lord Jesus. Put Him there in His place as Lord, and we will move on quickly toward the adjustment of all the other parts and little bits.

Living Pieces

Well now, there is another thing I would like to say. We are all forming this one great pattern, but we are doing so only as we are under the control of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is making this picture, we are not making it. The Holy Spirit is carrying out this design, the Holy Spirit is going to realise this great end of God. He is the One Who is doing it, operating it all, but we are not just like little bits of cardboard. This is where there is a difference between us and any jigsaw puzzle. We are living bits, and the Holy Spirit needs to have us working with Him, cooperating with Him, responding to Him. Then the Holy Spirit says, This is your place! We say, I do not like that place, I would like to be in some other place! The Holy Spirit

says, This is what you are for! We say, I would like to be something else than that! The Holy Spirit says, This is your shape! And we say, I do not like it. I would like to be another! Anything like that, and the thing cannot go on. We have to know the Holy Spirit, walk in the Spirit, live in the Spirit, respond to the Spirit, and the Spirit will do the rest. But it is a matter of obedience to the Lord, obeying the Holy Spirit, being moved by the Spirit and being responsive to the Spirit.

The Complete Whole

Now all this is perhaps going to take a long time. It has taken a few hundred years so far, it may take a bit longer yet, but it is going to be finished; and then God is going to show His wonderful completed picture to the whole universe. "When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at in all them that believed" (2 Thess. 1:10). The day is coming when all that believe will look and say, Well, I could not understand what the Lord was doing, I could not at the time rejoice in the place in which the Lord put me; it was all so strange. I could not see how it fitted in; - I see it all now! He was working to a perfect design; it is marvellous! "To be marvelled at in all them that believe". We have to believe that the Lord, in all this strange seeming mess and mixture, and jumble, and puzzle is working a perfect design, a perfect pattern; it is all going to work out all right and be perfect in the end. There are a lot of pieces yet lost, and what a trouble these lost pieces are, these pieces that are out of the way. The New Testament is full of that which speaks of pieces out of the way, pieces which have gone astray, which are lost. Paul had his hands full of trying to get those pieces back again, following them up, searching them out, gathering them in. We have to work in that way to bring in the lost pieces, to recover those that have strayed. It is a lot of work, but that is our work. The Lord, by His Spirit as we work with Him, will accomplish His perfect design. In the end it will be very wonderful.

I remember a story about the late Bishop of Durham, Dr. Handley Moule. There was a great colliery disaster in Durham about Christmas-time in which many of the miners were lost, buried alive. When this took place they sent for the Bishop, and he came down to the pithead; and there were all the wives and children of those miners in a terrible state, and he did not know what to say to them. He began to speak, and he said, We cannot understand this strange way that God has taken, we cannot see what He is doing, but it is like one of those things that you work on linen; you are working to a design, but at present you can only see the background, and when you look on the back of the piece of linen, you know it is an awful jumble, all the threads are crossed, you cannot see anything at all; but then you turn it over and you see the perfect design. Just now, that is what God is doing; He is doing something, but we are only seeing the back of it, all the jumble of crossed threads. Presently the day will come when He will turn it over and we shall see what He has been doing - a perfect picture! That is only another way of talking about a jigsaw puzzle. The Lord teach us the lessons, and help us to respond to them and fit in, by His grace.

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