



ROMANS Part 113

Chapter 12:3-5

Being at peace with who you are.



For I am saying, through the grace which is given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to be overweening, beyond what your disposition must be, but to be of a sane disposition, as God parts to each the measure of faith. 4 For even as, in one body, we have many members, yet all the members have not the same function, 5 thus we, who are many, are one body in Christ, yet individually members of one another.

DON'T OVERDO IT

Paul has just exhorted the Romans to become living sacrifices that are holy and well pleasing to God. He told them in the first two verses of this chapter to be testing what is the will of God as they seek those things which are good, well pleasing and perfect. Now he's telling them, "But don't overdo it!" Paul is so concerned that some will think he's resorting to law that he preempts even the possibility. Paul is about peace. His gospel is about peace. He wants no one losing either their minds or their peace, and trying to do too much, to be too perfect, to stew over sainthood, or over-test the will of God.

Picture an exhausted Roman, dark circles under her eyes, asked by a fellow saint, "Julia, what is the matter? You're starting to look like a Southern Baptist." Julia shares a tragic tale about how *hard* she's been trying to accomplish every Pauline exhortation in the latter parts of the Roman letter, that her walk might reflect the high truth of the evangel. But she's so worried about falling short that here she sits, shaking like a palm frond, barely able to strike the match for her fifth cigarette.

Paul wisely curtails such a scenario by beginning—"For I am saying, through the *grace* which is given me..." and we know right away that this is not law, but grace. Paul is not throwing any part of Sinai back into anyone's face. See how quickly he accentuates the thing

that is the hallmark of his evangel: grace. He talks about behaving for two sentences and then—bang—in comes the grace. His ensuing words come, then, “through the *grace* which is given”, and we know that the grace given to Paul—and which Paul then gave to us of the body of Christ—is transcendent (2 Corinthians 9:14). It rises beyond any grace given to any other apostle, even those of the Circumcision.

OVERWEENING

“For I am saying, through the grace which is given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to be overweening, beyond what your disposition must be...” (Romans 12:3).

“Ween” is an archaic word. I don’t know why A.E. Knoch chose it for the Greek word *hyperphroneo* in the Concordant Version unless perhaps it wasn’t so strange back in 1920 when Knoch compiled the version. Here’s the definition:

ween; *verb* (used with or without object), Archaic.

1. to think; suppose.
2. to expect, hope, or intend.

I like the thought of “intend.” I would have liked to have seen “intend” in the version, like this: “Do not be over-intending, above what your disposition must be.” This is more understandable than, “over-weening.” It makes lovely sense to me, too, and Paul’s statement directly after it taps the truth of God’s sovereignty. Note the “must”—it is the most surprising and intense word of the sentence. I’ll be getting to it in a second.

The first thing new believers want to do is “everything right.” The initial thrill of the message can easily lure believers into the same trap that the law drew Jews into. The law tempted Israel into intending their brains out (at the insistence of God), and frequently over-intending (“zeal without recognition”—Romans 10:2), until they drove themselves mad and broke every law in the tablet. We know the result of trying to do “everything right” in the name of Moses. The law, to the over-intender, produces more indignation and sin (Romans 7:8). Well, the flesh is unable to enact God’s legislative mandates (Romans 8:3). The Pharisee Saul provides a fine example of someone attempting perfection in the law and, because of *maniacal* intention, becoming a criminal. Paul hates to see this happen to folks as nice as the Romans. Thus, he takes drastic preventative measures. He doesn’t want sweaty saints, but would appreciate instead acolytes of the faith.

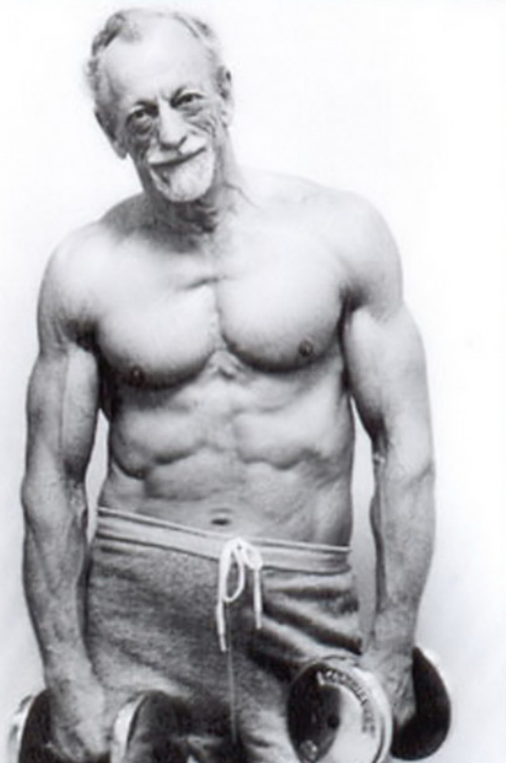
PRE-DETERMINED DISPOSITION

Paul taps the absolute viewpoint now, namely that God has pre-determined precisely how dedicated and how righteous each individual believer will be. When, in church, do you ever hear the message: “Don’t worry too much about what a good Christian you may or may not be. You can’t help how God made you. You can’t live out what God does not put in”? Yet this is essentially Paul’s message. “There is a certain way that your disposition in this matter of becoming a living sacrifice *must* be (God has pre-determined it), so you might as well not strain too hard because you won’t even be able to *strain* yourself out of a disposition that *must* be, due to a pre-determination of God.”

Thanks to Paul, straining (“over-weening”; “over-intending”) becomes reliable evidence that we are working and trying beyond our God-given capabilities.

TRAIN, DON’T STRAIN

I think of weight training. When trying to grow muscle, there must come some strain upon the target tissue. The muscles must be stressed and taken *just* beyond their capacity of endurance. The strain and subsequent recovery combines to produce a stronger muscle. There is a point, however, when one overstrains, producing diminishing returns. Over-straining (over-training), can do more harm than good. One of my mottoes in working out over the



years, both in my resistance training and in my sprinting program is: “Train, don’t strain.”

Paul would also have it this way with the saints. He would gladly have them pressing toward the mark, but wants none of them collapsing along the way because of over-intending—trying to do more than God has intended for them. Trying to live out what God has not put in leads to debilitating discouragement.

Let’s face it. Some people are better than we are at a lot of things. When I ran marathons, I competed against myself. I knew what time I wanted to run, and I ran to beat my personal best time. If I had foolishly lined up at the front of the pack of the Marine Corps Marathon in Washington D.C. in 1983, for instance, and come off the starting line running sub 5-minute miles, I’d have collapsed before the first mile of the 26-mile race. How would that have served my *personal* purpose? How would it have honored the person God made *me* to be? The athletes able to sustain sub five-minute miles for the duration of the race do so through a combination not only of intense training, but exceptional genetics.

It’s the same with body-building. I can go to a gym and

improve the contours and overall appearance of my body, but if I somehow become convinced that I can compete with elite bodybuilders and I begin training accordingly, I’m going to quickly become disappointed, demoralized, and probably dead. Genetics plays a huge role in how large or defined a person’s muscles can become. Straining against the genetic pre-disposition invites disaster.

Let’s apply this now to our walk in Christ. We all want to walk worthily of the calling. Some of us will do better than others at this. Some of us *want* to do better than others. But God has set a disposition toward this faith and this walk for each one of us. This is a disposition that we cannot overcome. Over-straining against it (over-weening; over-intending) will effect the same detrimental results as too much weight applied too often upon a frame of a wanna-be Mr. Universe who has no more chance of becoming an elite bodybuilder than James Taylor has of becoming a rapper.

TRY SANITY INSTEAD

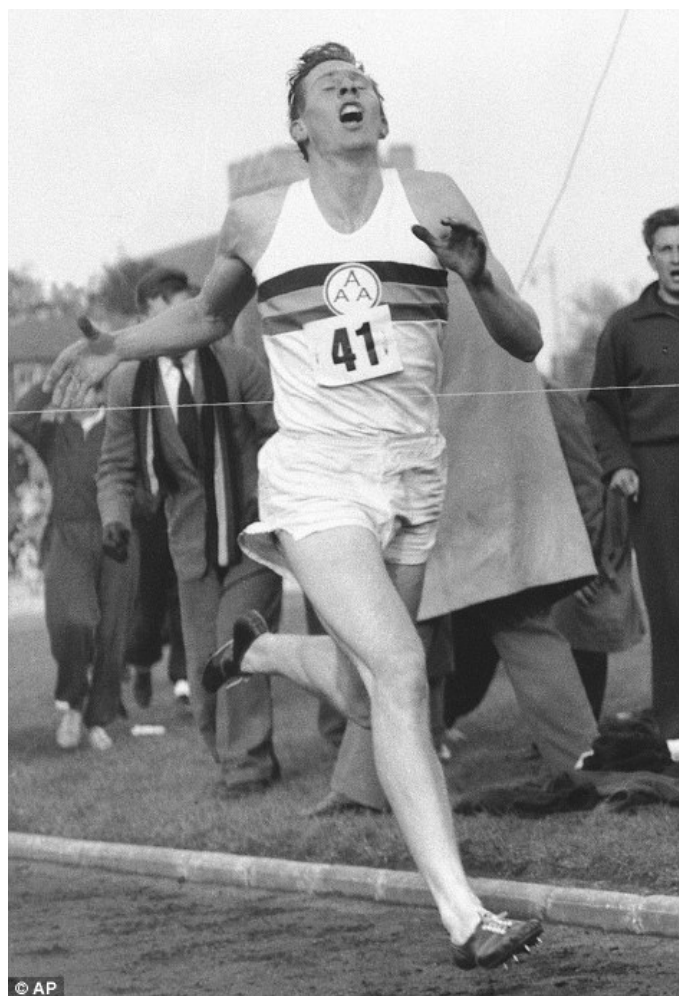
“...be of a sane disposition, as God parts to each the measure of faith” (Romans 12:3).

Nothing will drive you crazier than trying to be like someone else. I know people who have bought way more house, for instance, than they could afford, just to keep up with the houses of their siblings. Never mind the fact that their siblings had better jobs, or a stronger drive for wealth, or a better capacity for handling significant home-owning responsibilities. Envy of another’s possessions, as well as their dispositions, has robbed many of their own quiet, peaceful (though smaller) dispositions, and robbed them of peace. They grew not only too soon and too fast, but out of proportion to their pre-set dispositions given them at birth by God.

This eventually leads to insanity. And I mean literal insanity. There is nothing more mentally debilitating than straining against either genetics or God. Hell, genetics *is* God.

FAITH

“God parts to each the measure of faith.” Here is one of my favorite statements in Scripture. Faith does not bubble up from some private reservoir of faith. Impossible. Why? “Not one is seeking out God”—Romans 3:11. Rather, faith comes *from* God. Faith speaks of our capacity to enact this walk that God has set us upon. Isn’t it called “a walk of faith”? Since it is a walk of faith,



and since God parts to each the *measure* of faith, then we will only be able to effect this walk to a limited measure, for faith has come to all of us in *measure*.

Note two things about this statement. First, “God parts to *each* the measure of faith.” The suggestion is that each one has a certain amount of faith. Secondly, “God parts to each the *measure* of faith.” No one has all faith. We each have only a measure. Some have a cup, some half a cup, some only a tablespoon, some as little as a thimbleful. Since God has pre-determined the measure of each one’s faith, the teaspoon guy ought not attempt the faith of Mr. Cup; he’s be over-weening. And Cup Girl girl ought not be condemning Miss Thimble; Thimble can’t help it; God has pre-determined her tiny amount. This is how much faith she *must* have, and for her to strive for more would be over-straining on her part.

Let’s all try to hang on to our sanity.

ONE HAPPY FAMILY

For even as, in one body, we have many members, yet all the members have not the same function, thus we, who are many, are one body in Christ, yet individually members of one another.

The key phrase here is, “all the members have not the same function.” Some of us are supposed to be striving for the high calling, which is a place of ruling and reigning among the celestials, in Christ. Others would be over-intending to attempt such a walk. These would be better suited to serving the saints simply, in whatever manner suits their capabilities. Such individuals should not feel guilty, or lesser, than those taking on and producing more. To each his or her own.

Isn’t this the lesson of the body of Christ? We are one body, but many members, and not all the members are disposed to be or to do the same thing. Listen to Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:14-21—

For the body also is not one member, but many. If the foot should be saying, “Seeing that I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” not for this is it not of the body. And if the ear should be saying, “Seeing that I am not an eye, I am not of the body” not for this is it not of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where the scent? Yet now God placed the members, each one of them, in the body according as He wills. Now if it were all one member, where were the body? Yet now there are,

indeed, many members, yet one body. Yet the eye can not say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” or, again, the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”

As members of the same body, let us be solicitous toward one another. Let us not strive against one another in jealousy or envy. Let us not strain to become someone



who we are not. Let us neither strive to be more than we must be, or look down on those who are meant to be less than we are. Such qualifiers as “more” and “less” do exist in the body of Christ, but “unnecessary” does *not* exist, and never will.

Each one of us is needed. We need one another. God needs us all. Let us insist and ensure that each member of Christ’s esteemed body feels appreciated and loved in whatever capacity he or she serves. For God parts to each the measure of faith. —MZ