

Things That Sound Biblical... But Aren't: "Moderation In All Things"

Theme: Clearing a few misconceptions about God's word.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9.25

- A. **This morning we take a look at another often-used phrase that sounds biblical, but isn't: "Moderation in all things."**
1. If you do a search online you will find that many people think that this is either an explicit Bible verse ...or that the exact sentiment is spoken of in scripture.
 2. But guess what? **They won't find it because it isn't in the Bible at all!**
 3. But that doesn't stop people from quoting this phrase as a biblical verse (perhaps because self-control is a biblical virtue often found in scripture).
 4. *It certainly doesn't stop people from misapplying it!*
 - a. BlueLetterBible.org: *"It is frequently reasoned by those unfamiliar with the context of the ...phrase that a person should approach all things (whether healthy or unhealthy) with moderation."*
 - b. **Therefore a moderate amount of a bad thing can be indulged in.**
 - c. Does that sound like sound biblical advice/instruction/ethics?
- B. **Today we will look at this phrase and note that, while this admittedly ancient maxim does contain a kernel of biblical relevance (the need for self-control), it is a statement that is logically inconsistent and unscriptural.**

I. The Origin of the Phrase & The Kernel of Truth.

- A. **Unlike some of the other phrases we have looked at that were of relatively modern origin... this particular phrase was common in antiquity.**
1. It was associated with Greek thinkers and writers of the ancient past.
 2. Its prominence is seen in its inclusion in inscriptions in ancient temples of the past like the temple to Apollo at Delphi: *"In the ante-chamber of the temple at Delphi are inscribed maxims for the bettering of human life. Their authors are the men the Greeks say were wise... These men came to Delphi and dedicated to Apollo the well-known sayings 'Know thyself' and 'Moderation in all things.'" (Pausanias' Description of Greece)*
 3. **Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable:** *"The essential thought is found in the work of the Greek poet Hesiod (c.700 B.C.): 'Observe due measure, moderation is best in all things.'" (Elizabeth Knowles)*
 4. However, the phrase is best associated with the great Greek philosopher Aristotle and his concept of the **"Golden Mean"** (written around 350 B.C. in book 2 of his work titled "Nicomanchaen Ethics").
 - a. Geisler summarized: **"The right thing is the "golden mean" or moderate course of action."**
 - b. Summarized by one college's journalistic ethics instructor: *"Moral behavior is the mean between two extremes - at one end is excess, at the other deficiency. Find a moderate position between those two extremes, and you will be acting morally."*
Source: <http://faculty.bucks.edu/rogerst/jour275morals.htm>

- B. Throughout time, many who have claimed to be God-fearers and followers of Christ have used this phrase in their writings.**
1. The OT apocryphal **"Letter of Aristeas"** (c. 100 BC, sec. 223) uses the phrase: *"But it is good that there should be moderation in all things."*
 2. The fourth century church writer, **John Chrysostom**, used it in a positive way in *"Homilies on Statutes" (1.15).*
 3. Both **John Calvin** (Institutes IV, xiv., 17) and **Charles Spurgeon** used the phrase in a positive manner in their writings/sermons: *"'Be sober.' And does not that mean, first, moderation in all things?" (1886 sermon)*
 4. Even modern scholars have employed it: *"One must practice moderation in all things. Even something as good as honey will have an evil effect if used immodestly."* (**Ronald Hawkins**, KJV Bible Commentary on *Prov. 25.26-28*)
- C. There is a kernel of biblical truth in this statement allowing for its use and misuse... that of the need for self-control, a virtue spoke of often and at length in both the Old and New Testaments: Pr. 25.26-28; Gal. 5.22-23**

II. The Logical Inconsistency.

- A. Seen in the misuse of this statement as justification of moderate engagement of harmful (sinful?) activities.**
1. To say that one may engage in the "moderate use" of things that can cause physical or spiritual harm is inconsistent with scripture for moderation never transforms sinful behavior/activities into righteousness.
 3. **Example of the Misuse:** Saving yourself (sexually) for marriage but engaging in every form of physical activity just short of union as a means of moderating one's sexual urges: **1 Cor. 7.1-3; Heb. 13.4; 1 Cor. 6.19-20**
 4. **What is needed is self-control not "moderation" as some understand it.**
 - a. A moderate amount of poison will still kill you... just more slowly.
 - b. A moderate amount of sin is still sin... and if unrepented will still rob you of eternity in heaven *"for the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6.23)*
- B. Seen in the wording of the statement itself: "Moderation in ALL things."**
1. **"All"** makes this an absolute statement inclusive of every thing/situation).
 - a. **One of the things needing to be "moderated" is "my moderation" since it forms a part of "all things."**
 - b. But that is not how people use this statement is it?
 2. Are there situations that call **full commitment** rather than "moderation?"
 - a. When there are fires/accidents do emergency responders drive fast to the situation and fully engage/fully put out the fire/fully extract someone from the vehicle... or do they drive half the speed limit, put out half the fire, and extract some of the people from the accident?
 - b. Should we be moderately thankful? Moderately faithful? Moderately committed to Christ? Or are we called to be immoderate?
Reference... Rom. 12.9-12; 2 Cor. 7.10-11; Rev. 2.10
 - c. **Did Jesus sin when he showed committed zeal? John 2.13-17**
- C. C.S. Lewis noted the inconsistency of this phrase in his book, "The Screwtape Letters" (page 43) in which a demon, Uncle Screwtape, instructs his nephew Wormwood on how to best handle new converts to Christ. (see quote on scripture sheet)**

III. The Closest Biblical Statement. (1 Corinthians 9.25)

- A. This passage in 1 Corinthians is the closest you will come to finding the phrase “Moderation in all things” in the Bible.**
1. However, in context, the apostle is speaking of **the need for self-control rather than taking a “moderating position/ethic.”**
 - a. NET: *“Every competitor must exercise self-control in all things...”*
 - b. Paul uses the example of an ancient athlete to demonstrate the full commitment and dedication required to maintain a proper Christ-centered ethic! **1 Cor. 9.26-27** *(he uses this example as a spring board to issuing a warning about engaging in the idolatry and sexual immorality that was rampant in Corinth: 10.1-12).*
 - c. This present tense verb is only used twice by Paul and means *“To keep one’s emotions, impulses, or desires under control: self-control, abstain” (BDAG)*
 2. **Let’s think logically about this verse and the illustration used:**
 - a. An athlete restrains himself with regards to bodily urges and lifestyle so that he can attain top physical form/performance.
 - b. **Keener (IVP-BBC):** *“A long period of intense discipline was mandatory for any who planned to participate in the events. For instance, participants for the Olympic games had to swear by Zeus to follow ten months of strict training beforehand.”*
 - b. But does an athlete restrain his competitive spirit or does he want to win every time he competes? The best athletes have a will to win!
 - i. Should pole-vaulters run to the pit at half-speed or a full run?
 - ii. Should they only seek to qualify or set their PR/win each time?
 - c. **Illustration:** *Dash in the Incredibles being instructed to finish second.*
- B. Paul is not instructing us towards half-measures in this verse... but a full commitment to Christ demonstrated in daily, ongoing self-control!**

What This Means for Us

- A. We must remember that self-control (not some Greek concept of an “ethical middle ground”) is the virtue extolled by scripture.**
1. But this self-control is rooted in the full commitment to Christ.
 2. We will be tempted by our desires **(Jas. 1.14-15)**
 3. Only a full commitment to and reliance upon Christ in those times will give us the strength we need to overcome.
 4. I have known people who actively sought to discourage Christian zeal.
 - a. Certainly “zeal without knowledge” is wrong.
 - b. *But why is it that so often we fail to recognize that some things in life require the full commitment (zeal) rooted in complete faith?*
- B. The fact is... when it comes to Jesus, half measures are rendered worthless!**
1. Are you willing to fully commitment your life to Jesus today through the faith-response of baptism in order to be completely added to his church and fully forgiven of sins?
 2. **Then come and give yourself to Him fully right now!**