

Philippians 4:1-7

Manifesting Moderation

Let your moderation be known unto all men...v. 5

What does the term *moderation* bring to mind when you hear it? A number of things come to my mind off the top of my head. It seems that in our culture today especially in Reformed circles you hear the word *moderation* used with regard to the use of alcoholic beverages. The common Reformed view is that such beverages be used in moderation. There is a recognition that too much alcohol will make you drunk and whether you believe in the moderate use of such beverages or you believe in abstinence from such beverages the common denominator to both views is that drunkenness is a sin.

I cannot deny when it comes to this issue that my own view of it has been effected by the kind of culture I grew up in. Alcoholic beverages were regarded in my culture as a drug that served the purpose of making you drunk. I knew of no other use for such beverages. It wasn't until I became a Christian and then years after that that I eventually became exposed to the view of Reformed Christians that alcohol could be a socially acceptable beverage if it was used with moderation.

So that's one thing that comes to mind by the term *moderation*. Another thing that comes to mind is a similar sounding word to *moderation* which is the word *modesty*. I received a blog article a couple of weeks ago written by a Pastor in Africa. It's entitled "A Letter from Kabwata." Kabwata is located in Zambia, a country in South Central Africa. It's a country that was explored by the Scottish explorer David Livingston who had a vision of ending slavery through a 3 "C" formula – the 3 C's being Christianity, Commerce, and Civilization. Let me read you a portion of this letter from Zambia, keeping in mind, now, this idea of modesty:

"A century or two ago, Christian missionaries came from the West and taught us the Bible. As a result of this, we did away with polygamy, cannibalism, tribal feuds, etc. We were taught to put on more clothing to hide our nakedness. We learned to desist from tattooing our bodies, which were now temples of the living God. We even stopped sacrificing our babies to ancestral spirits.... The world seems to have gone full circle. It was the West through its Christian missionaries who taught us decency and propriety but now Western society is walking around half naked."

It's a sad but true commentary on Western Civilization and our country in particular. Modesty is all but gone. What's even worse is that the church of Christ is moving in the same direction. May the Lord help his people to be willing to go against the flow and to be transformed by the renewing of their minds rather than conformed to this present evil world.

Now, recall what I said last week about this 5th verse in Philippians 4. Lloyd-Jones calls on his audience to compare v. 5 to v. 4 and then answer the question – which is easier to obey, the exhortation to rejoice in the Lord always or the exhortation to let your

moderation to be known unto all. Lloyd-Jones believes that the exhortation pertaining to moderation is more challenging. He points out that v. 4 is something that is cultivated on a vertical plane – i.e. as I draw near to Christ and grow in grace and in my knowledge of him I gain the power to rejoice even in circumstances where rejoicing doesn't come naturally. Verse 5 by way of contrast deals with the believer on a horizontal plane – i.e. the practice of moderation is something that takes place among men. Our moderation is something that other people are suppose to see. I suppose you could say that it's always more challenging dealing with men than with God.

Given the broad meaning of the term *moderation* as well as the challenge it presents to the follower of Christ I want to look more closely at this exhortation this morning.

Let Your Moderation be Known unto All Men

What I'd like to do today is analyze the exhortation in terms of its meaning, it's manifestation, and the motivation behind it. The motivational aspect of the text is given in the rest of the verse. Note how it says *Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.* Consider with me then first of all that if you would let your moderation be known unto all men:

I. You Must Know the Meaning of Moderation

This is one of those words that is translated in various ways across the spectrum of English Bibles:

Let your reasonableness be known to everyone (ESV)

Let your gentle spirit (gentleness) be known to all men (NAS)

Let your forbearance be known to all men (YLT)

The Amplified Version of the New Testament is always an interesting version to consult in such verses as this. The Amplified Version, as its name suggests endeavors to amplify each word by giving you several different words or phrases. The Amplified Version reads like this: *Let all men know and perceive and recognize your unselfishness (your considerateness, your forbearing spirit).*

Moderation, reasonableness, gentleness, forbearance – usually when I see this kind of variety in translations it leads me to think that there's a textual issue behind the word – i.e. there might be more than one possible Greek reading in the many Greek manuscripts that are still in existence. In this particular verse, however, there is no variant Greek reading. The Greek word is the same across all the manuscripts.

The challenge behind the word lies in the fact that there is no English word that can correspond precisely with the Greek word. One phrase that a few commentators suggest is the phrase *sweet reasonableness*. Another phrase suggested by at least commentator is *big-heartedness*.

I think the view put forth by Lloyd-Jones might come closest to Paul's intended meaning here since Lloyd-Jones gives consideration to the context of the statement. Remember the specific event that Paul refers to back in v. 2 which was the unsettled quarrel between Euodias and Syntyche. It's in the context of that quarrel that Paul says in v. 5 *Let your moderation be known to all men*. With that context in mind Lloyd-Jones suggests that what Paul has in mind is restraint. Let your restraint be known to all men. Or another way to put it is self control.

Lloyd-Jones gives a very vivid description of this virtue both negatively and positively. He draws a very important distinction between moderation and a kind of cold stoicism. Let me quote a little of Lloyd-Jones here:

“By moderation, Paul does not mean just good nature...He is not talking about psychology or temperament. Nor, secondly, is he referring to what we may call a looseness, a flabbiness and lack of definition. That cannot be what the Apostle means by moderation, because he has already been saying to us, ‘Stand fast in the Lord.’ ...The people who are to be moderate in all things are the people who are to stand fast in the Lord at all costs. They are not compromisers; they are not men and women who, because they believe nothing in particular themselves, can be indulgent with respect to everybody else....So we must get rid...of the idea that moderation means a kind of indifference, a vagueness, a nebulous attitude towards truth and life and everything else.”

There's the negative side to moderation – what it doesn't mean and what we must avoid making it to mean. What does it mean, then, positively? Again I draw from Lloyd-Jones:

“It means the capacity to differentiate between what is really of vital importance and what is not, to stand like a rock by the things that are vital, but to be reasonable about the things that are not. It means not pressing my bargain to the very last drop of blood, it means being prepared, at times, and if necessary, to have less than is due to me for the sake of the Church and for the sake of others, but above all, for the Lord's sake. ‘Let your moderation be known unto all men’” not grasping, not so carried away that your whole spirit is involved.”

Lloyd-Jones goes on to describe moderation in the sense of having self control both in times of joy and times of sorrow. So in times of joy you don't become so exuberant as to be frivolous and in times of deep sorrow you don't become so controlled by sorrow that you sink into the depths of despair and become swallowed up by overmuch sorrow. I know the term is often times abused among Christians but I think if you had to come up with a corresponding term to moderation that term might be *balance*.

When you think about this virtue of moderation the way I've been describing it the person that comes readily to mind is Christ himself. He was anointed with the oil of gladness but you never behold him in the kind of hedonistic gladness that characterizes the world today. He was also a man of sorrows but you never behold him so dominated by sorrow that all he can do is walk around all day saying ‘woe is me for all that is wrong in the world.’ He is the model for our moderation and this leads to my next point of analysis.

If you would let your moderation be known to all men you must not only know what moderation means, but:

II. You Must Rise to the Challenge of Manifesting Moderation

Let your moderation be known Paul writes. It's something that must be seen. Indeed it must be seen far and wide. *Let your moderation be known unto all men*. You begin to see why Lloyd-Jones views this virtue as a daunting challenge. I'm more prone to say let my seclusion be known to all men. I'll build a monastery around myself and shut myself off to everybody so I don't see them and find myself constantly irritated and provoked by them and they, in turn, need not be bothered by me.

I'm not about to suggest that there's no place for seclusion. We need seclusion. We need to come aside for a while and sit at the feet of Jesus. We need to be engaged in that one thing needful. All I'm suggesting is that there is no place for permanent seclusion for the follower of Christ. You are not to hide your light under a bushel, but you're to let it shine before men. In a sense that's the broad meaning of letting your moderation be known to all men. You're to let your light shine.

How, then, are we to manifest moderation? I would suggest to you that the best place to start would be in the study of the perfect model of moderation – Christ himself. In 2Cor. 10:1 Paul bases his exhortation on the moderation of Christ. *Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ...* The word *gentleness* contains the same root word as our word *moderation*.

So when you read the gospel narratives of Christ's life and death you should pay special attention to the virtues that Christ manifests. We don't hold to the limited notion that Christ's life and death are only designed to set an example for the believer. We recognize that much more was done by Christ than to simply set an example. He earned our righteousness and he paid our debt by his atoning death. Having said that, however, neither should we deny that in Christ's words and actions he has left us an example.

This is the very thing Peter appeals to in his first epistle 2:21: *For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: 22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: 23 Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.*

Here, then, is the perfect example of moderation being manifested. Christ was reviled but reviled not again. If ever anyone was entitled to assert himself in his own defense it would have been Christ. He was, after all, sinless. No charge could justly be laid on him. If ever a man would have been just in calling upon 12 legions of angels to deliver him it would have been Christ.

But his own "rights" so to speak was not what dominated his heart. His own entitlement to the justice of heaven yielded to a higher cause even the salvation of sinners. I would suggest, therefore, that in your love for Christ and to Christ you learn to love the very

virtues that he manifested in his love toward you and you seek in the power of the Holy Spirit to manifest those virtues. We read earlier in the service this morning that portion from John's gospel where a woman caught in the very act of adultery is brought to Christ. Can you see how patient Christ is on that occasion. The angry Jews who are bent on trapping Christ in his words and finding occasion against him are hostile and anxious but Christ himself refuses to be pulled down by their hostile actions. He continues to write in the sand as if he doesn't hear them.

And then at last he speaks a word - *He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.* It's not a harsh word. It's not spoken with the thunder of Sinai. It's simple and it's direct and it's convicting. And as the Scribes and Pharisees slither off the scene under a sense of their own sin and shame the magnanimous heart of Jesus comes into even fuller view when it's just he and the woman that was taken in adultery on the same stage as it were.

Can you see her in her humiliation and shame? She's probably too embarrassed to even look up. Whether she knew it or not she was before the One who did have the authority to condemn her. She was before the One against whom sin is ultimately committed. But what a gracious word is spoken to her when Christ asks her *Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?* She replies *no man Lord.* And then in a statement that not only comes to her but comes to us all through the gospel Christ says *neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.*

What a remarkable word of grace! What a magnanimous heart! What sweet reasonableness! And notice that it's a word that comes not at the expense of the standard of righteousness but as a word that gives encouragement toward righteousness. *Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more.* Isn't that the gospel in a nutshell? Isn't that the word you heard and I heard when the Holy Spirit conveyed the good news of salvation to your soul? *There is therefore, now, no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus – so go and sin no more.*

And this is the spirit and demeanor that you and I are called on to manifest to all men. *Let your moderation be known to all men.* I wonder this morning – have you been wronged? Has someone ill-treated you in such a way that the very thought of that person and his or her misdeeds just makes you bristle? It could be your boss or it could be a neighbor or a relative or a stranger. It might even be another Christian. Wrongs are especially painful when they come from other Christians because they should know better but somehow they don't. It may be that a brother or sister in Christ is unwittingly being cruel to you without even realizing what they're doing.

Or maybe your situation is like the one that Paul is referencing in this 4th chapter of Philippians. Maybe Euodias and Syntyche are right here in this congregation but with different names. What do you do? How do you treat them? Should you upload posts onto Facebook in which you describe them but don't name them so you can at least draw sympathy from others?

No – you should instead let your moderation be known unto all men. I think what Paul writes to the Corinthians comes into play here. You remember that among the many problems in Corinth there was the problem of Christians taking other Christians to court. In addressing that issue in 1Cor. 6:7 Paul writes *Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?*

Does that become an impossibly difficult thing to do? It only becomes difficult if you don't have the proper motivation. And that's what leads to my final point. We've seen that if you would let your moderation be known unto all men you must know the meaning of moderation and you must rise to the challenge of manifesting that moderation. Consider finally that to let your moderation be manifested:

III. You Must Draw Your Motivation from Christ

Notice again the words of the text *Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.* It seems that a number of commentators take this statement *The Lord is at hand* to be a reference to the second coming of Christ. The Amplified Version that I cited earlier reads like this *The Lord is near* and then adds this amplified statement in parenthesis *He is coming soon.*

If that is Paul's intended meaning then it would fit into the application of moderation this way: The Lord will soon be here. When he comes everything will be sorted out. The wrongs that you feel you're suffering now will be made right then. You will be vindicated on that day when the hidden things are brought to light.

The application can also be drawn that you yourself will be called on to give account when the Lord returns. *For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ* Paul writes in Rom. 14:10 in similar fashion to he has already stated earlier in Phil. 2. *For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.* And the practical application that Paul draws from the truth of that accountability is given in the next verse of Romans 14. So in v. 13 we read *Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.*

This idea of not judging each other would then tie into the practice of moderation. You would be saying in effect – I'm not going to push the issue of what I think or of my opinion, I will, instead, leave that matter between that man and the Lord. He and I will both stand before the Lord one day and I want to be able to speak for myself on that occasion by saying I practiced moderation; I exercised restraint. I held to my own scruples but I didn't make my scruples on occasion to be at odds with my brother in Christ.

I take that to be a valid application of the statement *The Lord is at hand.* I know that when it comes to believers standing before the judgment seat of Christ there are many theologians and commentators, especially among those who are Dispensationalists to treat the judgment seat of Christ as if it were nothing more than an awards banquet. However,

when Paul refers to that judgment seat in 2Cor. 5 he goes on to say in v. 11 *Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord we persuade men*. There is something about that Day that will have a terrifying aspect to it. I believe that on that Day we will learn as never before our need for grace and we will be thankful as never before that we will have an advocate in Christ.

So that is one form of motivation you can draw from when it comes to showing your moderation to all men. *The Lord is at hand*. He'll be returning soon. Our heart cry is the sooner the better. Knowing that he is at hand in this fashion should provide you the incentive to yield your issues to him instead of contending with your brother and know that you too will stand before him to give account.

I think, viewed that way, you would have to say that the statement *The Lord is at hand* provides negative incentive for showing your moderation to all men. I don't believe, however, that this is the only application we can draw from the truth that *The Lord is at hand*. A number of English versions translate the statement *The Lord is near*. Could we not then take the statement to mean that he is near right now? It's not so much a matter of waiting for his return which does draw closer each day but it's also a matter of his nearness right now. That is certainly consistent with the promise of Christ *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world* (Mt. 28:20).

Like many other aspects of the Christian life, you see, this aspect of showing your moderation to all men is something that doesn't come naturally. As Christians we still possess our sin natures which means that we are constantly having to struggle with the area of asserting ourselves and getting our own way and insisting that we're right. And we find it difficult if not impossible to yield to our brothers and sisters in Christ in any way, shape, or form.

I'm right in my opinion about everything. All you need do is think for yourself and you're bound to come to every conclusion I've come to. All I did was think for myself. And so you become so gripped by your own opinions and notions that it becomes virtually impossible to yield to anyone about anything. And now there comes this exhortation to let my moderation be known to all men? If everyone would just see everything the way I see it then they would know how reasonable I am – or not.

How can I draw the power or the motivation to overcome this fleshly tendency which at the end of the day amounts to pride. Here's how you find the power or the motivation – *The Lord is at hand*. All that you need comes from him. He is a very present help in time of trouble or in time of strife or quarreling. Behold him in his moderation as he says while nailed to a cross *Father forgive them for they know not what they do*.

Thank God this morning that he hasn't taken up the issue of his quarrel with you regarding your sin but has committed your judgment to Christ so that he could be gracious to you. I think the connection between vv. 4 and 5 of our text enters the picture at this point. You remember the previous exhortation that you're to rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice.

And if you succeed in rejoicing in the Lord always so that you're constantly aware of your blessings in him then you'll find the grace you need to let your moderation be known unto all men. The next verse following our text also enters into how you draw the power for this precept. Verse 6 – *Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*

Take your case to the Lord in prayer so that you're not swallowed up in anxiety. And don't forget how blessed you are in Christ. Don't forget how much you've been forgiven. Don't forget the riches of his grace and all the benefits that have been conveyed to your soul. And by keeping your mind stayed on him you'll find the example and you'll draw the power and you'll gain the motivation to let your moderation be known unto all men.

You've gained too much and Christ loves you too much for you to allow your heart to be dominated by issues that in the broad perspective of eternity are issues of such little consequence. So rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice. And while you're in that frame of spirit let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand!