Moderation in All Things?

One of the ideas that has surfaced through man’s reason is the idea that moderation is a desirable trait, and that moderation in all things is a reasonable goal. We even sometimes hear it put just so “moderation in all things”. The question I would like us to consider today, is whether this is a Scriptural concept or not.

Much of what passes as common wisdom we recognize to be unscriptural, yet could it be that something commonly held in such high regard as moderation might be an unscriptural ideal, or will Scripture support the idea of moderation in all things?

moderation in all things proverbial saying, mid 19th century; a more recent formulation of the idea contained in there is measure in all things. The essential thought is found in the work of the Greek poet Hesiod (c.700 bc), ‘observe due measure; moderation is best in all things’, and of the Roman comic dramatist Plautus (c.250–184 bc), ‘moderation in all things is the best policy.’

So, the idea has been around for rather a long time, and the particular phrase, for more than a hundred years. Now, let us consider what Scripture says on the matter.

Proverbs 23:20-21 (KJV)
20 Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh:
21 For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.

So, here excess of drinking, and eating are spoken against

Pr 6:10-11 — Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: 11 So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.

And here, excess of sleep (laziness).

Galatians 5:22-23 (KJV)
22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness,
faith,
23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Verse 23 does indeed hold temperance as a virtue.

Proverbs 25:16 (KJV)
16 Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it.

Honey has a wonderful sweet taste, and yet too much is still too much.
1 Corinthians 9:24-25 (KJV)

24 Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.
25 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

The apostle Paul speaks here in verse 25, of temperance in seeking mastery physically, and recommends by extension that we practice such spiritually, seeking an incorruptible crown.

Proverbs 15:16 (KJV)

16 Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith.

Often as here, we see that we are well advised to content ourselves with less of something such as in this case riches, than to seek excess, and cause ourselves trouble or grief.

We have seen here, a small sampling of scripture references that advocate moderation, or temperance. Thus we see that there is scriptural basis for moderation or temperance in many things, but the statement we are examining today refers to “all things” and so we need to consider whether there are things that we should not exercise moderation in.

Mark 12:28-30 (KJV)

28 And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?
29 And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:
30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

Now here, we have something in which we must not observe moderation. Our love of the Lord, must be complete, total, with everything we have. This certainly is not moderation!

Romans 6:11-12 (KJV)

11 Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.
12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.

And here, another idea where moderation is not appropriate. Sin. If we are indeed dead to sin, we will not follow it at all, and if we abstain from something, in this case sin, we are not being moderate.
John 15:12-13 (KJV)
12 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.
13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Can we indeed be moderate in our love toward one another, when the Lord has commanded that we love one another as he has loved us, if we give due consideration to what that means? The Lord died on the cross for us, as a sacrifice in our place. If we are to love one another that much, this certainly is not a moderate position.

Matthew 6:14-15 (KJV)
14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:
15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Will we seek to be moderate in our forgiveness of others, in view of this passage, where we are told that if we will not forgive men their trespasses against us, the Father will not forgive us ours against him?

Mark 11:25-26 (KJV)
25 And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.
26 But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

Here again, that same message, forgive or else be unforgiven. No, no moderation is acceptable here!

Galatians 5:19-21 (KJV)
19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,
20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,
21 Envysings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

No moderation is acceptable here either. If we live after the flesh, even moderately, we are told we will not inherit the kingdom.

Galatians 5:22-23 (KJV)
22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,
23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

And here, I fear, is where we find many seeking moderation, to sin moderately, and to be moderate in their following of the spiritual way. The list of sins in Gal: 5:19-21 is not complete, there are other works of the flesh listed elsewhere in scripture, yet though we
are told, essentially, “Do this and die” we, like Eve, and then Adam, too often seek to practice these fleshly works, we just try to practice them in moderation. The problem here, is that it only takes one deliberate and unrepented sin to separate us from God, and from our inheritance.

Seeking moderation in sin is to seek death. Seeing moderation in spirituality, is the same. We need instead to be seeking to immoderately drive out all the sin in our lives, and at one and the same time to immoderately seek to fill our lives with the fruit of the Spirit!

When we listen to the message of the devil, the message that is drummed at us constantly in the media, that it is ok to practice sin, that we just need to be moderate about it, we listen to the same lie the serpent told Eve.

When we listen to the other message the devil seeks to advance, that we must be moderate in our righteousness, in our spirituality, we listen to a message that is equally false.

What we need to do, what scripture demands we do, is to abstain from the works of the flesh, and to fill our lives with the spiritual. To burn with fervent zeal for the Spiritual, and to feel revulsion for the worldly.

This is a struggle for us, for we are presently clothed in flesh, and all the temptations of the flesh find purchase in us. Only through the power given to us through the Holy Spirit, by which we are sealed to God, the Holy Spirit we have been promised after baptism, only through the strength lent to us by Jesus Christ, who strengthens us in this way, can we successfully overcome the temptations.

We are told that God will not allow us to be tempted above what we are able to resist:

1 Corinthians 10:13 (KJV)
13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

When we are tempted, it sometimes seems we are tempted very hard, even above the temptation others receive, but look again at V13 above, “such as is common to man.” And we must be awake, and aware, so that we will look for the way of escape God provides, and take advantage of it.

Moderation in many things, many aspects of our lives is desirable, good, but in other areas, we must seek either complete abstinence, or complete immersion, abstinence from all evil, and immersion in all that is good and spiritual, and neither abstinence, nor immersion is moderate.
So, in conclusion dear brothers and sisters, “Moderation in all things” is neither a Scriptural idea, nor a scriptural practice.