

Chapter 11: Ministry as Moderation (*epieikes*) and Self-Control (*egkrateia*)

The verses that speak loudest to me about moderation are Phil. 4:5-7, 11-12 and 19 (MKJV) –

Let your moderation (*epieikes*) be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. ... Not that I speak according to need, for I have learned to be content in whatever state I am. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound. In everything and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. ... But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.¹

The word *epieikes* can also be translated “gentleness” and many Bible versions use this word. But when we look closely at the above text, it becomes clear that Paul is writing about the attitude Christian believers ought to have toward needing material things: “Do not be anxious about anything,” “Not that I speak according to need,” “both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need” and “my God shall supply all your need.”

It is true that we need a certain amount of material things such as food, shelter and clothing. But these basic needs easily slide into desires for More, Newer, Prettier, Bigger and Better. The advertising business has learned how to “create the need” for the latest, tastiest or most advanced things – clothing styles, flavored coffees, mobile phones, music players, digital cameras, computers and cars. As Wendell Berry writes in *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community*, –

We live in a time when technologies and ideas (often the same thing) are adopted in response not to need but to advertising, salesmanship, and fashion. Salesmen and saleswomen now hover about us as persistently as angels, intent on “doing us good” according to instructions set forth by persons educated at great public expense in the arts of greed and prevarication.²

You are constantly bombarded by advertising. So you wake up one fine morning with the idea in your head, “I just have to buy a new _____ today!” Madison Avenue brainwashing has done its job on you. When we step back and think about it calmly and rationally, it becomes clear that more and more people on earth cannot continue consuming more and more things ad infinitum. Something is seriously wrong with this picture! Psychologists call it “cognitive dissonance,” but we ordinary people call it just crazy. He who dies with the most toys is nonetheless dead. There

must be higher values in life, something greater to live for than mere material things. The answer is found in the above passage: “The Lord is at hand.” Christ’s return is just around the corner. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, ready to burst into full view!

St. Paul uses the same term in Titus 3:2-3, instructing believers “to speak evil of no one, not to be contentious, to be gentle (*epieikes*), showing all humility toward all men. For we were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.” When we look at the phrase “serving various lusts and pleasures” it seems clear that Paul has “to live in moderation” in mind for *epieikes*. In that case, the Greek word *praotes* that is translated “humility” should rightly be translated as “gentleness.” So Paul is writing essentially the same message to Titus’ church as he wrote to the church at Philippi: “live in moderation, showing all gentleness toward all men, don’t be driven crazy by desires for more, bigger and better things which will poison your relationships with people around you.”

Strong’s Dictionaries define *epieikes* as “appropriate, that is, (by implication) mild: - gentle, moderation, patient.”³ Thus, *epieikes* is living in a manner that is “appropriate” for followers of Christ. When Yahweh called Abram, He said, “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you. In you will all of the families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). And God promises to bless us, His chosen people, but not so that we will squander it on ourselves; rather so that we can be a blessing to others. That is the appropriate way for God’s people to live.

There is another aspect to moderation – Deut. 8:6-20 records how Yahweh instructed Moses to warn the Israelites as they were going to enter the Promised Land overflowing with milk and honey that they must not forget Yahweh and think it was their own abilities that had gotten them all this wealth. If they began thinking that way, they would turn to idolatry! Yahweh gave them all of the abundant natural resources of the Promised Land so that He might establish His eternal covenant with Israel. God’s blessings have a material aspect that takes place in time and space, but their purpose is eternal, so that His people can be a blessing to others. To relate to material wealth in any other way degenerates into idolatry. Solomon put it very succinctly – “God, I’m asking for two things before I die; don’t refuse me – Banish lies from my lips and liars from my presence. Give me enough food to live on, neither too much nor too little. If I’m too full, I might

get independent, saying, 'God? Who needs him?' If I'm poor, I might steal and dishonor the name of my God"⁴ (Prov. 30:7-9, MSG). This is an excellent description of living in moderation.

Conversely, the prophet Jeremiah issued a stern warning to Shallum, king of Judah, that he would receive a donkey's burial for his selfish disregard for the poor and needy –

“[Woe to him] who says, I will build me a wide house and spacious chambers, and cuts him out windows; and it is ceiling with cedar, and painted with vermilion. Shall you reign, because you strive to excel in cedar? Didn't your father eat and drink, and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Wasn't this to know me? says Yahweh. ... He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem” (Jer. 22:14-16 and 19).

Many rich nominal “Christians” in the West live in spacious mansions paneled in fine wood, and their children have grown up and moved away, but the parents are keeping a house that is much larger than they need “in case the kids come for a visit.” So two-thirds or more of the house sits vacant for 51 weeks of the year. What hotel or motel manager would keep two-thirds of his rooms vacant for 51 weeks of the year in case a convention might come to town? It would be far less expensive for those parents to rent a suite in a nearby motel for the kids and grandkids for a week. All that wasted space in empty-nester houses is wealth that could be invested in God's Kingdom, building ministry centers for poor and needy disabled people in town.

These rich nominal “Christians” may have raised their right hand or come forward for prayer as a teenager. They may even be good, law-abiding citizens, go to church, read the Bible, attend a home fellowship in their church, and sincerely believe they have eternal life. But what did Jesus say to the rich young man who asked Him what to do so that he could have eternal life?

Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except one - God. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder,' 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not give false testimony,' 'Do not defraud,' 'Honor your father and mother.'" He said to him, "Teacher, I have observed all these things from my youth." Jesus looking at him loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack. Go, sell whatever you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me, taking up the cross." But his face fell at that saying, and he went away sorrowful, for he was one who had great possessions. Jesus looked around, and said to his disciples, "How difficult it is for those who have riches to enter into the Kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus answered again, "Children, how hard is it for those who trust in riches to enter into the Kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich

man to enter into the Kingdom of God." They were exceedingly astonished, saying to him, "Then who can be saved?" (Mk. 10:18-26)

Please note that Jesus "loved him" – He didn't condemn him, calling him a "filthy rich exploiter" or something of that sort. But at the same time, Jesus didn't condone the rich man's trust in his material possessions. Jesus gave the man an opportunity to choose between wealth and following Him, but sadly the young man chose to hold on to his riches. What great difficulty rich people have parting with their great possessions! And yet, one day they will most certainly part with them: naked we came into the world, and naked shall we leave it. We can't take one cent or even one kopeck, 1/26th of a cent, with us when we die! It is a sad but true fact that poor people are more generous givers, considering the percentage of their income that they sacrifice to the Lord, but rich nominal "Christians" tend to be rather poor givers.

How many other passages deal with our attitude toward material riches? Consider these – "For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits his own self?" (Lk. 9:25). "Carry no purse, nor wallet, nor sandals. Greet no one on the way" (Lk. 10:4). We know of one American "missionary" to Russia who left with a full load of luggage, but had to return in order to take another 16 pieces of luggage back to the U.S.! Perhaps most to the point is this –

For we brought nothing into the world, and we certainly can't carry anything out. But having food and clothing, we will be content with that. But those who are determined to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful lusts, such as drown men in ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some have been led astray from the faith in their greed, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:7-10).

Having enough to eat and sufficient warm clothing to wear (it is -9 Fahrenheit outside as I write this in Moscow) is *epieikes*-moderation. Having more leads to temptation and many harmful lusts that can ruin your testimony and even destroy you! Greed has led many astray from the faith. So we must "be free from the love of money, content with such things as you have, for he has said, 'I will in no way leave you, neither will I in any way forsake you'" (Heb. 13:5).

The other Greek term we should consider here is *egkrateia* – self-control. St. Peter tells us that since we have become partakers of the divine nature – "...for this very cause adding on your part all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence; and in moral excellence, knowledge; and in

knowledge, self-control (*egkrateia*); and in self-control patience; and in patience godliness” (2 Pet. 1:5-6). The KJV translates this word as “temperance” which we usually associate with the limited use of alcoholic beverages, but in his commentary Matthew Henry defines it as “moderation about worldly things,”⁵ so we can rightly think of it as synonymous with *epieikes*.

The verb form of *egkrateia* is *egkrateuomai*, which we find in 1 Cor. 9:25 – “Every man who strives in the games exercises self-control (*egkrateuomai*) in all things. Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible.” *Strong’s Dictionaries* define *egkrateia* as – “self control (especially *continence*): - temperance.”⁶ The other New Testament usages of this word are in Acts 24:25 when Paul was on trial before Felix – “As he reasoned about righteousness, self-control (*egkrateia*), and the judgment to come, Felix was terrified, and answered, ‘Go your way for this time, and when it is convenient for me, I will summon you,’” and in Gal. 5:22-23 – “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control (*egkrateia*). Against such things there is no law.”

Moderation and self-control, as we see in these passages, are important character traits for the Christian. But how do they relate specifically to ministry? They are the positive side of some negative behaviors the Apostle Paul warns against, when writing about qualifications for church ministry. In 1 Tim. 3:1-3 he writes – “This is a faithful saying: if a man seeks the office of an overseer, he desires a good work. The overseer therefore must be without reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sensible, modest, hospitable, good at teaching; not a drinker, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous.” The office of overseer is *episkopos*, the equivalent of today’s pastor or bishop. In verse 8 (ISV) Paul gives some qualifications for deacons (*diakonos*) – “Deacons, too, must be serious. They must not be two-faced, addicted to wine, or greedy for money.”⁷ So in these negative phrases we find the opposite of moderation and self-control, thus they can be fairly called qualifications for ministry or *diakonia*.

We have already discussed moderation and self-control in relation to material things and money. Now let us consider these qualities in relation to eating and drinking. The above passages speak out against excessive use of alcohol, as we also find in several other texts: Deut. 21:20-21 places the death sentence on drunkards and gluttons, and Prov. 23:20-21 tells us drunkenness and gluttony lead to laziness and poverty. In the New Testament we read: “But give attention to yourselves, for fear that your hearts become over-full of the pleasures of food and wine, and the

cares of this life, and that day may come on you suddenly, and take you as in a net”⁸ (Lk. 21:34, BBE); “For we have spent enough of our past time doing the desire of the Gentiles, and having walked in lewdness, lusts, drunken binges, orgies, carousings, and abominable idolatries” (1 Pet. 4:3); “Let us walk properly, as in the day; not in reveling and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and lustful acts, and not in strife and jealousy” (Rom. 13:13); and “Now the works of the flesh are obvious, which are: ... envyings, murders, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these; of which I forewarn you, even as I also forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:19a and 21). Here we see that gluttony (“orgies,” “carousings” or “reveling”) is on the same level as drunkenness, and the last passage cited tells us, “those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God.” On the same note, greed is on a similar list – “You know that wicked people will not inherit the kingdom of God, don't you? Stop deceiving yourselves! Sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexuals, thieves, greedy people, drunks, slanderers, and robbers will not inherit the kingdom of God”⁹ (1 Cor. 6:9-10, ISV). If such people will be excluded from the Kingdom of God, they should most certainly be excluded from ministry (*diakonia*) in the church, if they cannot or will not repent and turn away from these things.

We know of the enormous physical harm caused by gluttony: high blood pressure, heart attacks, strokes, diabetes, as well as hip and knee joint failure due to being overweight. Each of these can bring a person to an early grave. Obesity and diabetes, closely related to each other, have reached epidemic proportions in affluent societies today. I have sadly watched how people near and dear to me, as well as people claiming to be in the Lord's work have crippled their bodies or even killed themselves by gluttony. Paul writes in Rom. 16:18 – “For those who are such don't serve our Lord, Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by their smooth and flattering speech, they deceive the hearts of the innocent.” And in Phil. 3:18-19 he writes – “For many walk, of whom I told you often, and now tell you even weeping, as the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is the belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who think about earthly things.” The early church included gluttony in the list of seven deadly sins, right along with drunkenness, murder and adultery, sins for which a person can forfeit his soul. Gluttony = obesity = slow suicide. Christians do not have the right to commit suicide, not even with a knife and fork! The church throughout history has taken a firm stand against drunkenness, but the church today is largely silent about the “socially acceptable” sin of gluttony.

Michael Kanellos, editor at large at CNET News.com, wrote a fascinating column entitled “Killing me softly with salad dressing choices” in his March 12, 2006 blog –

Those who live in North America and Western Europe have more options in terms of food, careers, consumer items and everything else, said Barry Schwartz, Swarthmore professor and author of "Why Less is More" at PC Forum taking place in Carlsbad, Calif. this week. And that's the problem. The bewildering number of choices is paralyzing people with fear, unrealistic expectations, self-blame and regret. As a result, a trip to the electronics store becomes an opportunity to make a decision you could easily regret. The phenomenon is a big contributor of the significant rise in clinical depression, he said.

"Instead of liberating people, it paralyzes them," he said. "When human life was harder, people's expectations were pretty low. Now, it's not clear if anything will exceed expectations." A tour of his own grocery store underscored the mind-numbing degree of choice today, he said. There, he found 175 salad dressings, not including oils and vinegars, and 285 types of cookies. Studies back this up. In a grocery store experiment, a table loaded with 24 types of jams got many visitors, but sales were ten times higher when only six jams were offered.¹⁰

We need to return to the *epieikes*-moderation of the New Testament. The superabundance of food and other material objects (I refuse to call them “goods”) is definitely not good for us physically, psychologically or spiritually. Learn to “Just say no” to advertising hype, trust in the Lord, and be content with a moderate amount of food and other material things. What can we do to overcome overindulgence in food and drink?

First, I suggest praying and fasting: fast from meat, eggs and dairy products on Wednesday and Friday, drink lots of pure, filtered water or real fruit juice (with no sugar added), and devote more time to prayer. Once a month you can fast and pray the entire day on Friday. In Luke 2:37 we read about Anna, “who didn't depart from the temple, worshipping with fastings and petitions night and day.” Those were 24-hour times of fasting and prayer. Pray for restoration of the Body of Christ – including your own body – to the image and likeness of Christ. And pray that Christ will restore the Church to the ministry He practiced and taught His disciples to practice. But don't limit drinking lots of water or fruit juice to Wednesday and Friday only! You should drink about two quarts (two liters) of water or fruit juice every day.

Second, I suggest cleansing your digestive tract every three to six months using a good fiber such as psyllium, flax or bran mixed in a large glass of water or fruit juice along with a colon cleansing pill once a day for seven days. This will remove the sludge and toxins that have accumulated in your intestines and change the microorganisms there to help you lose weight.

You'll not only feel lighter, you will think more clearly and have much more energy! God wants our bodies to be holy: "Abstain from every form of evil. May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thes. 5:22-23). We need to rid our bodies of the evil pollution accumulating in our waste elimination system! It took me a visit to the doctor with abdominal pain to realize I had a problem. He ordered x-rays, blood and urine analyses, and prescribed some pills for acid reflux. Then a week later I ended up in the emergency room with intense back pain, where the doctor there repeated the x-rays, blood and urine analyses, added a CT scan to run up the bill (that's the "technological imperative" – if they have the technology, they must use it in order to pay for the equipment!), and he prescribed me a bottle of laxative. After another week I researched my symptoms on the Internet, and finally realized that I simply needed to thoroughly cleanse my digestive tract. So with \$15 of over-the-counter fiber and colon cleansing pills, in a week the symptoms went away, I felt lighter, was thinking more clearly and had so much energy I could hardly hold myself back!

Third, get at least 20-30 minutes of brisk exercise every day, or 40 minutes of brisk exercise three times a week, raising your heart rate to where it's hard to breathe and talk at the same time. Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit: "Don't you know that you are a temple of God, and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him; for God's temple is holy, which you are" (1 Cor. 3:16-17). At age 37, while working at a sedentary desk job, I ruptured a disk in my back after foolishly trying to lift too much when building a rock wall for our garden, and was paralyzed for two weeks from pain. I had to learn to walk again with a numb right leg, and I couldn't run or ride my bicycle on bumpy streets any more. By age 62, I couldn't walk more than 15-20 minutes due to increasing numbness in my right leg, so I finally had spinal fusion surgery to correct the problem. Now I do static exercises for 10 minutes every morning to stretch my back and leg muscles. I ride a stationary bicycle for 10 minutes or I take a brisk walk for 20 minutes after doing my static exercises to warm up. I'm trying to restore my body to wholeness!

Fourth, don't abuse your body by depriving it of rest: take one day off out of every seven days, and get seven or eight hours of sleep every night. "Six days shall work be done: but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation; you shall do no manner of work. It is a Sabbath to Yahweh in all your dwellings" (Lev. 23:3). Jesus told His disciples – "You come

apart into a deserted place, and rest awhile” (Mark 6:31). You need to “come apart and rest awhile,” or you’ll simply come apart! You have to give your body time at rest to restore itself. Don’t misuse your body, keep it clean and maintain it properly, so it can serve you – and the Lord – well for many years.

Little needs to be said about the harm caused to the body by the excessive drinking of alcohol: nearly every internal organ can be destroyed by it. But worst of all is the destruction of one’s eternal soul caused by drunkenness as well as gluttony. Those more experienced and proven in the faith should lovingly but firmly instruct younger servants (*diakonos*) to help them overcome these destructive habits if and when they appear, because the purity of the Gospel ministry (*diakonia*) most certainly depends on moderation and self-control.

Endnotes to Chapter 11:

1. Meyers, Rick, developer, *Modern King James Bible*, op. cit.
2. Berry, Wendell, *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community*, op. cit., xi.
3. Meyers, Rick, developer, *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, op. cit.
4. Meyers, Rick, developer, *e-Sword – the Sword of the LORD with an electronic edge, The Message*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).
5. Meyers, Rick, developer, *e-Sword – the Sword of the LORD with an electronic edge, Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Entire Bible*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).
6. Meyers, Rick, developer, *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, op. cit.
7. Meyers, Rick, developer, *International Standard Version*, op. cit.
8. Meyers, Rick, developer, *e-Sword – the Sword of the LORD with an electronic edge, Bible in Basic English*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).
9. Meyers, Rick, developer, *International Standard Version*, op. cit.
10. Kanellos, Michael, “Killing me softly with salad dressing choices,” (Future Tech Blog, http://news.com.com/2061-11128_3-6048784.html?part=rss&tag=6048784&subj=news, 2006).