

Can the Beatitudes Really Be Applied in Our Present Society, or Do We Have To Compromise and Accept Only Certain Things?

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We must not interpret the Beatitudes in a formalized manner, we must try to discern the aim of the Lord.

If something in the Gospel is not applicable to the present situation, can we find a criterion by which to judge the Gospels? What is that criterion?

A quick and ready answer usually is: “Modern man cannot accept it.” But why modern man? Who is modern man? I don’t know who this “modern man” is, because I am also a “modern man!” From where did modern man become the criterion?

Why should I regard other people who find difficulty with everything in Christianity as much more reliable and as exhibiting the real criterion?

Where is this easy criterion by which you judge?

Once a colleague of mine said that he would suppress for a time certain prayers and especially parts of the Beatitudes – “love your enemies” – because he hates his political enemies. And therefore, he says, don’t mention this to people because they may become not so valiant in the struggle with the Communists. My reply to him was that this may be very good but there is something else in the Gospel, Christ said that if you don’t love your enemies, you are not better than pagans.

Of course, everybody loves his friends, because one expects reciprocity or recompenses. But God acts. What is my point here? Because love is interpreted in a sense (by modern man) as acceptance, but love does not mean acceptance – love means you’ve got to love your enemies and you don’t hate them.

But on the other hand there is authority in them and this is the meaning of the Gospel passage. Of course, you can say, “but we cannot give our property away.” But this again is a wrong reading of the Gospels. Our Lord talked about riches, saying that those who have riches cannot enter the Kingdom. Actually Christ meant that people who have certain values, which they invented for themselves, will not submit to any check. People want to get into the Kingdom of God – not with external possessions, but want to take with them everything they like, including dancing, etc. But they never enter into the spirit of the Gospel. People want to reconcile what is not reconcilable.

First things must be put first. But we always want to put conditions. We shall be Christians if we are permitted to do all the wrong things which Christianity excludes. The Beatitudes must not be taken as rhetoric, but as general inspiration. We always expect advice and we should want to raise our secular purpose to a higher order.