

Introduction: Most people eventually get around to asking themselves the core questions of human existence, namely: Who am I? and, What am I supposed to be doing? *** In 1989 a management consultant named Steven Covey published a book, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Shortly after I joined my second insurance company in Worcester in late 1993, I was part of a group of twenty middle managers who went through three all-day meetings spaced out a month apart. We discussed how to incorporate his seven habits into our day-to-day work. As I read his introduction to his 381 page book I became convinced I could be open to his seven habits. He detailed how he had studied management literature going back to colonial days in the eighteenth century. He found that through World War II most focused on the character of people. The goal was to help people develop strong character qualities, especially goodness and truth. People with the right character qualities will do what is right in any circumstance – deeds flow from character. However, over the next fifty years the emphasis shifted to personality and technique. He used Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* as the prime example of this disturbing trend. *** Covey is right. Moreover, Jesus taught the same basic principle in the final third of His Inaugural Address of The Kingdom of God. In the portion we heard read this morning Jesus gives five standards for living in The Kingdom of God; and, the portion from *Psalms* complements these. All have to do with the character God requires in citizens of His Kingdom. *** The five are: we must fix ourselves first (character); we must continually seek God through petition (communication); we must trust our heavenly Father to enable us to do for others what we desire would be done to us (compassion); a willingness to be compressed (suffer) with Jesus; and, we must build our whole life on the solid rock foundation (Christ). We can only have good character when we are fully in Christ through surrendered, dependent and obedient faith we have received by the grace of God. *** Let's now discover how God elaborates on these standards of Kingdom living.

I. People should judge themselves first and ask The Father for good things. (Matthew 7:1-12)

A. Do not judge so as not to be judged and take the beam from your own eye. (Matthew 7:1-5)

1. You all must not be judging that you all may not be judged. (Verse 1)

Command-reason: The command is that no disciple of Jesus should ever judge another person. The reason for this is to avoid being judged by God under whom no one is able to stand innocent.

2. Because in the judgment you all are judging, you all will be judged; and, in the measure you all are measuring, it will be measured out to you all. (Verse 2)

Reciprocity: The second part illustrates reciprocity. God will judge harshly those who judge harshly.

Mercy: Mercy is needed to be productive in God's Kingdom, so judge others with His Mercy.

3. Jesus rhetorically asks individuals: why do you regard and try to remove dust from the eye of your brother and give no thought to the beam in your own eye? (Verses 3-4)

Dust and beams: Through hyperbole, rhetorical exaggeration, Jesus wants people to understand we all tend to overestimate the flaws of others, while greatly underestimating our own flaws.

4. Hypocrite! You must first cast out of your own eye the beam, and then you will see clearly to cast out the dust of your brother's eye. (Verse 5)

First fix myself: Jesus calls lack of perception hypocrisy. Each of us must first critically examine our own character, and actions flowing from our character, to fix ourselves. When we make self-correction our highest priority we are following the first of the ...

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B. Do not give the pearl of The Gospel to those with vicious contempt of it; but, continually ask the gracious Father for good things. (Matthew 7:6-12)

1. You all may not give the holy to dogs, neither may you all cast your pearls before the pigs; lest they will trample them under their feet, and having been turned around, they (the dogs) might tear you all in pieces. (Verse 6)

Wisdom concerning violent hearts: These are pre-domesticated dogs. Pigs are violent beasts. The 'holy pearl' is the Gospel of Jesus. He wants His followers to discern people hostile to Him and avoid them (Matthew 10:14; 15:14).

[from D. A. Carson] Jesus is asking them to pray for wisdom to apply wisdom from *Proverbs* (26:4-5). It is not easy. I am reminded of Danny in Springfield. Whenever he saw me, he delighted in telling me of his hard heart towards Jesus. One day I saw him eating in the Rescue Mission. When I showed my surprise he said, don't you think that even a person like me needs some peace?

2. You all must be asking and it will be given to you all, you all must be seeking and you all will find, you all must be knocking and it will be opened to you all; because each one asking is receiving, and seeking is finding, and to the one knocking it will be opened. (Verses 7-8)

Ask, seek, knock: They are individually and collectively to continue asking, seeking and knocking.

Given, find, opened: Then it will be given (by God), they will find, and it will be opened (by God). God responds to constant communication: This is the second of the ...

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3. Or, what man of all you men, whom his son will ask bread of him, will not give to him a stone, or also he will ask a fish and will not give him a snake? If then, you all being evil have known to give good gifts to your children (Verses 9-11a)

Humans: Even human fathers will give their children reasonable requests.

Evil and good: They may have some evil in them, but for their children they will be and will do good.

4. ... how much more your Father in heaven will give good things to them asking Him? (Verse 11b)

Father will give good: Jesus clearly says if they keep asking their Father in heaven for what they need, He will give them good things. Since He is perfect LOVE, He will provide all that is good and needed.

Bottom line: Therefore, all things that you all might be desiring that men might be doing to you all, in this way you all must be doing to them; because, this is the Torah and the Prophets. (*Verse 12*)

Do what desire done: What we call the 'Golden Rule' is first based on our critical self-examination, and then on our continually asking God until we are given His LOVE for others.

Torah and prophets: Loving one another in compassion per The Word of The God of LOVE is the third of the ...

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II. By grace you all should strive for the narrow way of righteousness by hearing and doing Jesus' authoritative words.

(*Matthew 7:13-14; Psalm 37:16-19; Matthew 7:24-29*)

A. You all must enter through the narrow gate leading to life. (*Matthew 7:13-14*)

1. You all must enter through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and wide is the way leading to destruction and many are those going by it. (*Verse 13*)

Many on way to destruction: Both the way (road) and the gate at the end that lead to destruction are easy to take and hence well-travelled.

2. Because narrow is the gate and compressed is the way leading to life, and few are those finding it. (*Verse 14*)

Jesus is only way to life: Grape presses compress grapes. Jesus is the only way to life (*John 14:6*) and people must share in His suffering (*John 16:33*). Willingness to be compressed is the fourth of the ...

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B. The righteous will be fed in famine. (*Psalm 37:16-19*)

1. Better is the little to the righteous, than the riches of many wicked; because the strong arms of the wicked will be broken, but Yahweh upholds the righteous. (*Verses 16-17*)

Righteous and wicked: Despite having few riches, Yahweh upholds the righteous; however, despite riches and strength, the wicked have a worse life because they will be broken (by Yahweh).

2. Yahweh is knowing the days of those without blemish, and their inheritance will be forever. (*Verse 18*)

Complete: The righteous are without blemish because of their faith in Yahweh, the One who finishes what He starts (*Philippians 1:3-11*, with *verse 6* at the center).

Forever: Their inheritance is living forever in the presence of Yahweh in the new heavens and earth (*Revelation 21-22*).

The righteous have an eternal inheritance

3. They will not be ashamed in evil times, in days of famine they will be satisfied with food. (*Verse 19*)

Filled with food: God graciously provides even His poorest people, who are righteous by faith, with all they need to serve Him with joy.

C. Hear and do Jesus' words or fall to destruction. (*Matthew 7:24-29*)

1. Therefore, whoever is hearing these words of Mine and is doing them, he will be like a man in his right mind who built his house on the solid rock. (*Verse 24*)

Hear and do: Those who are both hearing and doing are those who are trusting and obeying.

Rock: Jesus is the rock who followed Moses from Egypt through the wilderness (*1 Corinthians 10:1-5*) and on whom the church is built (*Matthew 16:13-20*).

2. The rain came down and the floods came, and the winds blew and they beat upon that house, and it did not fall because it had been provided a foundation on the solid rock. (*Verse 25*)

Rain and winds: No storm will ever cause a house (or life) established on the solid foundation of Christ to fall. A life wholly built on a relationship with Christ the solid rock is the fifth of the ...

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3. Everyone hearing these words of Mine and NOT doing them, he will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand, and the rain came down and the floods came, and the winds blew and they beat upon that house, and it fell and the fall of it was being great. (*Verses 26-27*)

Not do: Whoever will NOT do the words he has heard from Jesus will fall in the storms of life.

Great fall: And the fall of that disobedient man will be great every time a storm hits him.

Bottom Line: And it was, when Jesus had finished these sayings, the crowds were being amazed at His teaching because He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes. (*Verses 28-29*)

Ongoing amazement: This amazement at Jesus' teaching did not end with His Inaugural Address as The King of God's Kingdom, but it continued as they reflected on these words; and, as He taught them with more and more words.

Authority: They were given to understand His teaching had more authority than the Levites who knew and taught the Torah and the Prophets. The rest of Matthew's inspired Gospel brings this out.