

Lesson 7 Article  
Sermon on the Mount

It is said that there was a special, out-of-the-way place in the Temple where shy, humble Jews could leave their gifts without being noticed. Another place nearby was provided for the shy poor, who did not want to be seen asking for help. Here they would come and take what they needed. The name of the place was the Chamber of the Silent. People gave and people were helped, but no one knew the identities of either group.<sup>1</sup>

Christians who judge successful ministries by external statistics such as attendance figures, membership, baptisms, and offerings should seriously rethink their criteria in light of Jesus' words here. God judges the greatness of his servants by searching their hearts, examining their inner attitudes, and seeing deeds done in secret. Doubtless, his evaluations of who most honors him will invert a substantial majority of his people's evaluations.<sup>2</sup>

Verse 7 teaches against repetitious praying. This, too, is literal, for Paul acted on it and would only pray three times for the removal of the 'thorn in his flesh' (2 Cor 12:7–8, probably based on our Lord's model in Gethsemane—Matt 26:44). How, then, do we reconcile this with 1 Thess 5:17 (pray without ceasing)? Clearly, if all Scripture is inspired, these two verses cannot be contradictory; so we must understand 'pray without ceasing' as an injunction to be continually in a prayerful attitude, to pray about everything, but not to pray repeatedly for the same thing. Prayer is communication with God, so God wants us to keep in constant touch; but prayer should also be an expression of confidence in Him. When a believer feels he has to 'beat down the gates of heaven' with his prayers, this implies an insult to either God's interest in him or God's ability to answer his prayer. You might also ask, "But what of the parable of the importunate widow and the judge (Luke 18:1–8)?" The answer is that Jesus taught this parable to encourage believers to continue in prayer (v. 1), so it says the same as 1 Thess 5:17. Jesus assured His disciples that God hears and answers prayer by contrasting an unjust judge with our just God; if an unjust judge could eventually be persuaded to dispense justice, how much more assured can the believer be that His just God will dispense justice promptly in due season.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1985). *Matthew*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary (357). Chicago: Moody Press.

<sup>2</sup> Blomberg, C. (1992). *Vol. 22: Matthew*. The New American Commentary (122). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<sup>3</sup> Mills, M. S. (1999). *The Life of Christ: A Study Guide to the Gospel Record* (Mt 6:5–15). Dallas, TX: 3E Ministries.