

Importunity in Prayer Condemned

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Importunity in Prayer Commended
(Lk. 18:5, 7)

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(Mt. 6:7-8)

Importunity means persistence in solicitation. In the case of prayer, it means not giving up because a prayer is not answered right away, or in the manner it was requested. God often answers when the time is right as opposed to when we want it. Human beings usually want an answer right away, and if they don't receive it they assume God either didn't hear them, or He refuses to answer. In some cases, unanswered prayer is used as proof that God does not exist.

The context of the first scripture, used by some detractors to claim God contradicts His word, is dealing with human emotions. This is evident from the verse that introduces the subject of the parable.

Then he (Christ) spoke a parable to them, that **men always ought to pray and not lose heart** (i.e. become discouraged) (Lk. 18:1; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

Christ went on to use a worldly example of a judge who was indifferent to the woes of a widow. This judge's attitude was contrary to the intent of God's law regarding widows and orphans (cf. Ex. 22:21; Dt. 10:18; 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:19-21). This widow had a just cause and the judge should have been more than willing to listen and respond. Unfortunately, she had to

get to the point of aggravating him in order to obtain any justice against her adversary.

Yet because this widow troubles me (the judge) I will avenge (vindicate) her, lest by her continual coming she weary me (Lk. 18:5; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Judgment was finally rendered, but not because the judge acted speedily to lend assistance to the widow or cared about her plight. Instead, he eventually responded to her pleas because she was wearing him down in an attempt to get justice. Therefore his motivation was purely self-centered.

In contrast, Almighty God does hear the prayers of His people immediately and responds accordingly even though it may appear, from a human perspective, to be slow. The prayers of God's people are not an inconvenience to Him, which is why Christ used the example of a human judge in juxtaposition to emphasize this difference.

And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, **though He bears long with them?** (Lk. 18:7; emphasis added).

In the scripture above, Christ is making it very plain that Almighty God is not immune to the suffering of His people. Instead, God is involved and cares very much about the difficult situations that His people face while living in a system that is under the influence of the Adversary. Despite the constant prayers of God's people, many have died in service to Him, including many prophets during the First Covenant period (cf. Heb. 11:35-40).

When he (Christ; cf. Rev. 6:1) opened the fifth seal, I (John) saw (in a vision) under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the

word of God and for the testimony which they held. ¹⁰And they cried with a loud voice (in prayer), saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' ¹¹And a white robe (symbol of righteous conduct) was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed (Rev. 6:9-11; Ed. notes in parentheses).

When Jesus Christ prayed a number of times about his soon coming execution at the hands of the Romans, his heavenly Father heard and answered by giving him the strength he would need to finish the mission he was given to fulfill.

So he (Christ) left them (his disciples), went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words (Mt. 26:44; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Praying a number of times about the same situation is not vain repetition. Vain repetition is an aspect of pagan systems of worship where the adherents believe their god, or gods, will hear them only if they say the same phrase over and over again. This is a mindless exercise, and it is an insult to Almighty God who already knows what people need before they ask (Mt. 6:8). When Christ prayed three times, it was about his impending death and understandably he was in anguish and needed emotional support, which his disciples were unable to provide in his hour of need. It is clear that after praying three times Christ was strengthened by his heavenly Father and was able to continue on the difficult path that led to his execution a number of hours later.

The fact that Matthew 6:7-8 is used to claim there is a contradiction, regarding various

scriptures on importunity in prayer, shows a gross ignorance of God's word because Matthew 6:7-8 has nothing to do with being persistent in prayer. Instead, it is dealing with repeating phrases over and over again in some mindless attempt to get a god to respond. The next scripture is an example of this type of prayer and it went on for about nine hours (cf. 1Kgs. 18:29). These were priests who worshiped the sun god Baal, and his system continues today in religions that regard Sunday as their high day of worship.

So they (prophets of Baal) took the bull which was given (to) them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying, 'O Baal, hear us (answer)!' But there was no voice; no one answered. And they leaped about the altar which they had made (1Kgs. 18:26; Ed. notes in parentheses).

So repeating the same phrases over and over, and dancing around, are practices that are associated with pagan systems of worship. Many of these customs have been syncretized into Christianity today.

Instead of this pagan form of religiosity, God expects His people to be persistently asking for His intervention in their lives so they are better equipped to serve Him.

If you then (mankind in general), being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him! (Lk. 11:13; Ed. note in parenthesis).

In order to grow or maintain a relationship, there has to be continual communication and this is the main lesson in Luke 18:7. God is totally committed to hearing the prayers of His people but He does not want them to become discouraged, or get to the point where they cease communicating with Him.

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the (Holy) Spirit, being watchful to this end **with all perseverance** and supplication for all the saints (Eph. 6:18; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Pray without ceasing (2Thes. 5:17; emphasis added).

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