

The Problem for Praying Without Ceasing: Do We Need an Account of Prayer?

§1 Introduction

For impact per word, top marks go to Paul's imperative 'pray without ceasing' in 1 Th. 5:17 (ESV¹). As recorded in the *Philokalia*, the Desert Fathers sought to obey it in solitude, integrating repeated prayers with their breath and heartbeat.² And as illustrated in *The Way of a Pilgrim*, Eastern Orthodox mystics similarly devoted their lives to the attempt, holding that praying without ceasing is "the all-embracing means for reaching salvation and perfection" (1978, 158). Paul's words also challenge and inspire contemporary laypeople, with a number of popular titles offering advice about how to pray without ceasing.³

But 1 Th. 5:17 puzzles as much as it motivates. On first glance, it does not seem possible to pray without ceasing. Even bracketing the human need for sleep, we need only consider those duties which require engagement and attention. This worry traces to the church fathers. Origen wondered what praying must be for doing so without ceasing to "be accepted by us as a possibility" (1947, Ch. 7). Augustine asked, "Are we to be "without ceasing" bending the knee, prostrating the body, or lifting up our hands...?" and replied, "...this, I believe, we cannot do" (1886, §13). When discussing 1 Th. 5:17, Aquinas admitted that "prayer, considered in itself, cannot be continual, because we have to be busy about other works" (1947, SS, q8, a14). And the worry continues to the present day. Spurgeon (1872) devoted a sermon to it more than a century ago, and Piper (2004) and MacArthur (2011) are among the many pastors and theologians who discuss the problem for popular audiences today.⁴

¹ All scriptural references will be to the English Standard Version.

² REF

³ See, e.g., *Pray Without Ceasing: Mindfulness of God in Daily Life* (Simsic 2000), *Unceasing Prayer: A Beginner's Guide* (Farrington 2002), and *PrayerStreaming: Staying in Touch With God All Day Long* (McHenry 2005).

⁴ REF

This worry has spurred a variety of proposals about the true nature of prayer. Origen said that “we may speak of the whole life of a saint as one great continuous prayer” (1947, Ch. 7), and Augustine that “it is thy heart’s desire that is thy prayer” (1886, §13). Spurgeon averred that

Loving *is* praying; if I seek in prayer the good of my fellow creature, and then go and try to promote it, I am practically praying for his good in my actions!
(1872, 5)

Piper suggests that “a spirit of dependence” on God is “the very spirit and essence of prayer” (2004, 157), and MacArthur (2011, 15-17) holds consciousness of God is prayer.

Each of these strategies for dealing with the problem depends on an account of the nature of prayer. So, let us call them *account-based* strategies. From Origen to MacArthur, account-based strategies predominate. Unexplored, it seems, are strategies neutral about the true nature of prayer. *Neutral* strategies, in this sense, would be consistent with, just for example, the idea that nothing except petition – making requests of God – is prayer.

I identify and explore neutral strategies in this paper. To my knowledge, in the literature in analytic philosophy, there is not yet any discussion whose main focus is praying without ceasing.⁵ So, I shall err on the side of not leaving stones unturned. I will identify, on my count, *five* neutral strategies. My goal will not necessarily be to do full justice to each. To take one example, one neutral strategy is to reject the much-debated principle that ‘ought’ implies ‘can’. While I will highlight an important respect in which this debate bears on the problem for 1 Th. 5:17, I will make no attempt to adjudicate it.

Instead, more modestly, I will draw a roadmap of neutral strategies and cast some light on their prospects and costs. As it turns out, if my argument is on track, each of the strategies comes with non-negligible costs. This roadmap, and these costs, not only illumines the

⁵ REF

perspective from which an account-based strategy seems compulsory, but also helps us see what it would take to execute it. But, to change the metaphor, it also gives us a sense of the surrounding waters, for any wishing to get off the boat and develop a neutral strategy. Which option to take is left to the reader.

The paper is structured as follows. In §2, I discuss reasons to be unsatisfied with Origen *et al*'s account-based strategies, highlighting why it is worthwhile to explore neutral ones. To enable us to do so, I clarify how to think about the problem for 1 Th. 5:17 in §3. §4 explores five different neutral strategies. I conclude in §5.

§2 Origen *et al*'s Account-Based Strategies

Origen, Augustine, Spurgeon, Piper, and MacArthur offer quite *different* accounts of prayer. Being a saint, having desire, loving, having a spirit of dependence on God, and being conscious of God may have a family resemblance, but, for all that, they are distinct. Intriguingly, account-based strategists tend not to discuss competing accounts of prayer, much less offer reasons to prefer their own. Augustine does not mention Origen. And, perhaps tellingly, the notion that “loving is praying” is but one of “four or five” meanings of ‘prayer’ Spurgeon offers for our consideration (1872, 3), while “a spirit of dependence” is but one of “three things” prayer means according to Piper (2004, 157).

Plausibly, Origen *et al*'s main goal is simple: to relieve anxiety over the possibility of praying without ceasing. They may have assumed that achieving this goal does not require the elimination of competing accounts also showing promise to pacify the worry. Now, it might be that the more accounts of prayer with this promise on the table, the more confidence we should have in the proposition that obedience to Paul's words is possible. But to stop there is to purchase theoretical peace of mind at the cost of practical paralysis. One eager to pray without

ceasing needs a coherent idea of what to *do*, which is precisely what one will *not* get unless and until one has reason to accept and deliberate in terms of one account rather than the others.

One could handle this complaint by defending one of Origen *et al*'s accounts of prayer against all the others. But here a deeper problem faces us. Their accounts “work” by removing restrictions on what it takes to pray. And do they ever. In fact, it might not be too hard to imagine that one already lives a saint’s life, or desires, or loves, or etc. But then, as Tugwell puts it nicely, “the question cannot be avoided why I should also be expected to pray in any other sense” (2010, 26). Here 1 Th. 5:17 has been diluted to the point of being washed out. Eager to discern the feasibility of Paul’s words, an account-based strategist faces the temptation of starting, conceptually, with their own life as already structured, and then construing prayer as something which could fairly easily characterize the entirety of that life. But Tugwell is right that this gets things exactly backward: we should begin with “prayer as a fairly easily recognized activity in its own right” and then ask ourselves “how that activity can be carried over into the rest of [our] life” (Ibid).⁶

The present point is that an account-based solution to the problem for 1 Th. 5:17 must involve an account of *prayer*, and not something else. To the extent that it is unclear whether any of Origen *et al*'s accounts satisfy this constraint, it seems *difficult*, at least, to pull off an account-based strategy. So, it would be nice if some neutral strategies were on the table, too. Any such strategy, if it can be carried off, would allow us to deliberate and act in terms of activities whose status as prayer is uncontroversial – e.g., petition.

⁶ Tugwell’s point, I take it, is consistent with the idea that serious reflection on how to carry prayer into the entirety of one’s life may lend towards discernment of fresh aspects of prayer, or realization of the variety of forms prayer can take, or even deeper insight into the nature of prayer. It is just that such discernment, realization, and insight should be about *prayer*, and not something else.

But to see what neutral strategies could look like, we will have to get clear on how to think about the problem for 1 Th. 5:17. I do this in the next section.

§3 How to Think About the Problem For 1 Th. 5:17

§3.1 *A first pass at the argument against 1 Th. 5:17*

So far, the problem for 1 Th. 5:17 is simply that it does not seem possible to pray without ceasing. We have, at most, a rough enthymeme: it is not possible to pray without ceasing; so, there is something wrong with 1 Th. 5:17.

Two assumptions seem to connect the dots. The first is that an imperative, such as 1 Th. 5:17, is faulty unless we ought to obey it. Something is wrong with both ‘walk in front of that train’ and ‘spend the next hour counting by twos to one million’. For it is false that I ought to do either of these things – even if, notice, it is *permissible* for me to spend the next hour counting. Pristine imperatives are not just permissible to obey, they *ought* to be obeyed. The second assumption is that ‘ought’ implies ‘can’: anything we ought to do, we *can* do. Being unable to, it seems false that I ought to end world hunger by snapping my fingers, wonderful as that may be.

Combine these two assumptions with the idea that we cannot pray without ceasing, and something is wrong with 1 Th. 5:17. Or, to give a first pass at the argument against 1 Th. 5:17:

First Pass: 1 Th. 5:17 is an imperative telling us to pray without ceasing. Unless there is something wrong with an imperative, we ought to do what it tells us to do. But ‘ought’ implies ‘can’. And we cannot pray without ceasing. So, there is something wrong with 1 Th. 5:17.

The rest of this section refines this sketch of the problem.

§3.2 *On ‘wrong’ and ‘ought’*

First Pass involves the notion of something being ‘wrong’ with an imperative, as well as the notion of ‘ought’. Let us begin with the first.

The aim of an imperative is to affect or change, but not describe, how things are. In light of this, the standard view, which I will assume in this paper, is that imperatives do not have truth values and, so, cannot be false.⁷ Imperatives can, though, be evaluated in other ways. For example, an imperative is *satisfied* just in case it is in fact obeyed.⁸ But the problem with 1 Th. 5:17 is not that it is not (fully) satisfied, as that could be entirely *our* fault. So, consider Castañeda's list of other statuses imperatives can have: "reasonable or convenient, or allright, or proper, or correct, or appropriate, or justifiable, or due, or the right one in given circumstances", on the one hand, or unreasonable, inconvenient, improper, incorrect, etc., on the other (1975, 132).

Castañeda's list is helpful, but a distinction must be made. Consider this case:

Button: Our evidence indicates that pressing a particular button will save an innocent family from death. In point of fact, though, pressing it will actually cause them to perish needlessly.⁹

In Button, the imperative 'Press the button!' seems of a piece with the belief that pressing the button will save the family, the intention to press the button, and the action of pressing it, in the sense that each is to be evaluated positively in a subjective sense, but negatively in an objective sense. Each is "reasonable" or "justifiable" given our evidence, but none "correct" or "right" given all the facts. In the literature, such beliefs, intentions, and actions are often called *rational*, to capture the subjective dimension of evaluation, but *incorrect*, to capture the objective dimension of evaluation.¹⁰ Let us extend this terminology to imperatives. In these terms, 'Press the button!' is rational but incorrect, while 'Do not press the button!' is correct but irrational.

⁷ REF

⁸ See Dorschele (1989, 319-322) for a survey of the notion of satisfaction.

⁹ REF

¹⁰ REF

Something is ‘wrong’ with an imperative, in at least one sense or other, if it is *either* irrational or incorrect. But the problem with 1 Th. 5:17 concerns incorrectness, in particular. Imagine that, perhaps due to a consensus in psychology that human attention is severely limited, our evidence strongly indicated we cannot pray without ceasing. Then 1 Th. 5:17 would be irrational, perhaps. But now imagine, also, that this evidence is entirely misled, and the limitations on our attention illusory. Then 1 Th. 5:17’s irrationality results from a poor evidential situation, which is consistent with Paul’s words *themselves* being impeccable. What we care about is whether 1 Th. 5:17 is correct or incorrect.

Let us now turn to the notion of ‘ought’. Just as, in Button, it is rational to push the button but correct to refrain, I will assume that there is a subjective sense in which one ought to push it and an objective sense in which one ought to refrain.¹¹ Now, from this distinction alone, it is not guaranteed that there is any sense in which it follows, from an imperative’s being correct, that one ought to obey it. But we can assume that if there is such a connection, then from an imperative’s being correct, it follows that one *objectively* ought to obey it, in particular.

Two other points about ‘ought’. First, I will always have in mind the *all-things-considered* ‘ought’, rather than the *prima facie* or *pro tanto* ‘ought’.¹² For the second point, consider the contrast between ‘Robin ought to drive more carefully’ and ‘Socrates ought to be alive today’. They both might well express or imply the goodness or desirability of a particular state of affairs, namely Robin’s more careful driving, on the one hand, and the present existence of Socrates, on the other. But the first also clearly concerns what an agent ought to do, thus involving what is sometimes called an *agential* ‘ought’, while it is unclear whether the second bears any relation to what any agent ought to do, in which case it would involve merely what is

¹¹ REF
¹² REF

sometimes called the ‘ought’ of *general desirability*.¹³ Now, some reject this distinction, holding that ‘ought’ is always agential.¹⁴ But, if it holds, ‘ought’ in First Pass is to be understood not only as objective and all-things-considered, but as agential, too.

So far, I have elided a small point. Outside of any particular context, many imperatives – consider, e.g., ‘Brake!’ – are neither correct nor incorrect. My talk of imperatives, then, is to be understood as implicit for talk of imperatives *in contexts*. Now, in light of sorites, threshold, and other sorts of examples, some hold that an indicative statement can lack a truth value even in a context.¹⁵ But there seems to be no good reason to think 1 Th. 5:17 is relevantly similar to such examples. So, for the purposes of this paper, I will treat imperatives in contexts as always either correct or incorrect.

§3.3 *On ‘imperative’*

Unless 1 Th. 5:17 is incorrect, it is correct, and so, for this reason, an imperative we ought to obey. At least, so go our refinements to First Pass thus far.

Many examples suggest correct imperatives ought to be obeyed. ‘Brake!’ and ‘Vote for Alisha!’ seem completely untoward, rather than correct, if it is false that one ought to do these things. Indeed, the connection between the correctness of an imperative and its being such that one ought to obey it is tight enough that Castañeda, for one, holds them to be biconditionally related (1975, 243).

Some imperatives break this mold, though. My friend stares at a row of identical tuna cans, unable to decide which to take. A thief demands my wallet. I may say, ‘Take that one!’ to my friend, and ‘Take my money, but not my family pictures’ to the thief.¹⁶ These imperatives

¹³ REF

¹⁴ REF

¹⁵ REF

¹⁶ Compare with Castañeda 1975, 140-141 and Hamblin 1987, 29.

seem impeccable even if it is false that my friend ought to take the gesticulated can rather than another in the row, and false that the thief ought to take my money.

Such imperatives only come in so many varieties, though, and are outliers. ‘Take that one!’ is meant to encourage my friend to select *some* alternative among multiple equally advisable ones. It is what Castañeda calls a “procedural” imperative (1975, 140-141). ‘Take my money’ permits the robber to do something, but does not advise, demand, or command it. It is what Hamblin calls a “permissive” imperative (1987, 30). That procedural and permissive imperatives lack a connection to what we ought to do does not mean that normal, central, paradigmatic imperatives – pieces of advice, demands, commands, etc. – also lack it. With Hamblin, we could call such central imperatives “proper” (Ibid., 44-45). Perhaps the argument could be restricted to *proper* imperatives.

Relevant here is how to think about *suggestions*, e.g., ‘Try the cupcakes!’. Broadie appears to hold that there is nothing wrong with a suggestion so long as a goal its audience desires “may be” promoted by what is suggested, even if, as it turns out, it will not be (1972, 183). So, imagine that you desire a good taste experience and, for all I know, this will be promoted by your trying cupcakes which are, unbeknownst to me, absolutely terrible. If Broadie’s view is about the *correctness* of suggestions, then, on his view, my suggestion to try the cupcakes is correct even if you definitely ought not try them in the objective sense of ‘ought’. But suggestions appear to be proper imperatives – normal, central, etc.

Broadie does not distinguish rationality from correctness. I submit that his view is false if it is about correctness. Perhaps you could not blame me for uttering ‘Try the cupcakes!’, as it was rational given my reasons. But you could insist, after exposure to the terrible cupcakes, that

what I uttered was a *mistake*, objectively speaking. Put in our terms, my suggestion was incorrect. It seems correct suggestions ought to be obeyed.

For all I have argued, there still might be a kind of proper imperative whose correctness does not imply one ought to obey it. If this possibility troubles one, we could cast the problem for 1 Th. 5:17 in terms of commands. Paul's words are generally regarded as commands, and commands, surely, are correct only if one ought to obey them.¹⁷ However, until an example of a mold-breaking proper imperative is provided, I will leave it open in principle whether 1 Th. 5:17 is a command and instead simply restrict First Pass to proper imperatives. Correct proper imperatives, it seems, ought to be obeyed.

§3.4 On 'can'

Next is the principle that 'ought' implies 'can'. Now, I can speak English and I can speak Portuguese, but in different senses. I can communicate with English-speakers right now. But to communicate with Portuguese-speakers, I would need to take some classes. I have a *general* ability to speak Portuguese, but not the *specific* ability to do so which I have in the case of English. Moreover, as my voice is now in good condition and I have not been gagged, I have the *opportunity* to exercise my specific ability to speak English. The standard understanding of the principle that 'ought' implies 'can', accepted by proponents and opponents of the principle alike, is as follows:

OIC: If one ought to do something, then one has both the specific ability and the opportunity to do it.¹⁸

¹⁷ And consider Mounce on Greek imperatives generally: "There is no more forceful way in the Greek language to tell someone to do something than a simple imperative – particularly the second person imperative. Especially when such a command is given regarding a specific situation, the one giving that command sees himself as an authority figure. He expects those addressed to do exactly as he has ordered" (2003, 310).

¹⁸ REF

As I will now argue, we need *more* than simply OIC to feel the full force of the problem for 1 Th. 5:17. Assume, for the sake of argument, that we can bracket the human need for sleep by interpreting 1 Th. 5:17 as implicitly restricted to times when the agent is awake. (We shall discuss these sorts of restrictions more closely in §4.5.) Now imagine this Prayerful Nun:

Prayerful Nun wakes with words to God on her lips, then immediately begins working through her Psalter. She completes necessary menial tasks while reciting petitionary Psalms she had memorized, continuing in this manner till sleep overtakes her. She repeats this day after day.

Prayerful Nun can pray without ceasing. She *does*, after all. So, then, can we. (Well, perhaps, strictly speaking, many of us merely have the *general* ability to imitate Prayerful Nun. But we could gain the specific ability fairly quickly, all told, as it does not take too long to memorize a few good petitionary Psalms. So, OIC would only need minor tidying up, so that, so far as ability and opportunity go, it might well be that we ought to pray without ceasing.)

The problem for 1 Th. 5:17 has not been resolved, though. Grant that I can imitate Prayerful Nun. 1 Th. 5:17 is still in hot water because, at least *prima facie*, there are good reasons for me to do otherwise. I have a job, a spouse and children who depend on the money it brings in, and tomorrow is a weekday. I want to listen to my friends' stories and concerns. These activities, not to mention others, are not consistent with imitating Prayerful Nun. Hence, there are good reasons for me to do otherwise than imitate her. In fact, these reasons are *conclusive*: I *ought* to do otherwise. So, even if I can pray without ceasing, full stop, it seems that I cannot pray without ceasing *without there being conclusive reasons to do otherwise*.¹⁹ I wager that, in this, I am not alone.

¹⁹ Of course, whether one ought to do something can itself be phrased in terms of whether it is possible to do it in the *deontic* sense of possibility at issue when one says, e.g., 'you cannot promise to drive me to the airport and then back out'. In this paper, though, I shall reserve 'possible' and cognates for non-deontic types of possibility. For a survey of kinds of possibility, see Kment (2017).

But if I cannot pray without ceasing without there being conclusive reasons to do otherwise, then I ought to do otherwise and so, plausibly, it is not true that I ought to pray without ceasing.²⁰ So, it is not mere OIC which causes trouble for 1 Th. 5:17, but OIC*:

OIC*: If one ought to do something, then one has both the specific ability and the opportunity to do it without there being conclusive reasons to do otherwise.

Notice OIC* speaks of there *being* conclusive reasons, not our *having* them. This language aligns with the fact that, just as correctness and ‘ought’ are objective, the reasons in view are objective, too.²¹ The problem is not that I happen to *have*, perhaps by virtue of my believing them, reasons against imitating Prayerful Nun. That could be due to my irrationality or lack of imagination. The problem, if there is one, is that there *are* such reasons, objectively.

§3.5 *The argument against 1 Th. 5:17*

We can now consolidate our refinements to First Pass into the following argument:

- (1) 1 Th. 5:17 is a proper imperative telling us to pray without ceasing.
- (2) Unless a proper imperative is incorrect, we ought to do what it tells us to do.
- (3) If we ought to do something, then we have both the specific ability and the opportunity to do it without there being conclusive reasons to do otherwise.
- (4) We do not have both the specific ability and the opportunity to pray without ceasing without there being conclusive reasons to do otherwise.
- (5) So, 1 Th. 5:17 is incorrect. [from (1), (2), (3), and (4)]

Implicit for brevity is that the normative concepts involved are objective in the sense Button highlighted. Also, I will often use ‘can’, ‘able’, etc., to refer to the combination of specific ability and opportunity, and ‘imperative’ to refer to proper imperatives.

²⁰

Whether this follows depends on whether there can be genuine *moral dilemmas*. For further discussion, see §4.2.

²¹

REF

Warranting more discussion than I can here give is how much (5) should concern Christians. According to The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, Scripture is to be “obeyed, as God’s command, in all that it requires”, being “without error or fault in all its teaching” (REF). Scripture’s lacking fault of any kind is inconsistent with (5). But even Christians with other approaches to Scripture would, I take it, only accept (5) as a last resort. Or, perhaps more carefully, I am unaware of a Christian approach to Scripture which does not value preserving as much teaching from which believers may profit as possible. Moreover, as §1 makes clear, 1 Th. 5:17 has been an important inspiration for Christians of a variety of stripes.

§4 Neutral Strategies

In §2, we saw that it would be nice if neutral strategies were on the table, in addition to account-based ones. Given that (1)-(5) faithfully represents the problem for 1 Th. 5:17, we are now better positioned to see what neutral strategies could look like. They will be ways of objecting to (1)-(5) which are neutral with respect to the true nature of prayer.

In this section, I will identify and explore five different neutral strategies. In each case, I will argue the strategy comes with non-negligible costs.

§4.1 Strategy 1: 1 Th. 5:17 applies to a restricted audience

According to (1), 1 Th. 5:17 tells *us* to pray without ceasing. But, even restricting ‘us’ to Christians, perhaps the intended audience is even narrower. Imagine that a letter meant to be read aloud to a diverse group contained the following imperatives:

- (a) Compromise with your spouse.
- (b) Walk with good posture.

The unmarried and the physically handicapped need not obey (a) and (b), respectively. But this is no count against the letter. Given the diversity of its audience, (a) is intended for the married, and

(b) for the able-bodied. In light of differences between individuals, there can be an implicit restriction on those to whom an imperative applies.

Perhaps 1 Th. 5:17 is an instance of this phenomenon. There is a refrain in Paul that the body of Christ has different parts with different functions (Eph. 4; 1 Cor. 12). Perhaps 1 Th. 5:17 is for those specially situated to obey it. Perhaps it is for this reason that John Cassian said that “the aim of every *monk*” and “the destination of the *solitary*” is “continual and unbroken perseverance in prayer” (2015, IX, 2; X, 7, italics mine). Monks and solitaries are a select group. As Simsic points out, praying without ceasing was traditionally “considered a practice reserved for those in religious communities” (2000, 9).

But there is reason to be dissatisfied with this proposal. Paul can be quite explicit when there are restrictions on his intended audience. Note, e.g., his addresses to “wives”, “husbands”, “children”, “bondservants”, and “masters” in Eph. 5:22-6:9 and to those with the gifts of “prophecy”, “service”, “teaching”, “exhortation”, etc., in Rom. 12:6-8. No such indicators occur in 1 Th. 5:17, a verse near injunctions to not repay “evil for evil” and to “seek to do good” (1 Th. 5:15), which appear unlikely to have implicit restrictions on audience. So, the interpretation of 1 Th. 5:17 at issue appears *ad hoc*, at best.

§4.2 Strategy 2: Moral dilemmas

Moral dilemmas are (purported) situations in which one ought to do something and one also ought to do otherwise, in one and the same sense of ‘ought’. Some argue moral dilemmas are real.²² Consider a case. In *Sophie’s Choice*, a Nazi officer tells Sophie that exactly one of her two children, Jan and Eva, may survive, but only if she decides which. Perhaps Sophie ought to save Jan and she also ought to do otherwise, viz., save Eva. Now, (3) says that if we ought to do

²²

REF

something, then we can do it without there being conclusive reason to do otherwise. If moral dilemmas are real, (3) is false. For in any moral dilemma, one ought to *A* and one also ought to do otherwise. But one will not be able to *A* without there being conclusive reasons to do otherwise, as whatever reasons by virtue of which one ought to do otherwise will, *ipso facto*, be conclusive.

On this way of thinking, perhaps we ought to pray without ceasing, even though we cannot do so without there being conclusive reasons to do otherwise, in something like the way Sophie ought to save Jan, even though she cannot do so without there being conclusive reasons for her to do otherwise.

A standard line is that all purported moral dilemmas are merely apparent and, in particular, that the unfortunate agent's actual obligation is the *disjunction* of the two options.²³ On this line, strictly, it is false that Sophie ought to save Jan and false that Sophie ought to save Eva. What is true is that Sophie ought to *either* save Jan or save Eva. And, of course, Sophie can do *that* without there being conclusive reason to do otherwise.

My own take on the matter is that the standard line is correct. Unfortunately, giving the matter its due would take us too far afield. I will simply register that if we go in for resolving the problem for 1 Th. 5:17 in this way, we might well have to become comfortable with the idea that God and the Nazi officer are similar in this respect: each is the source of a set of obligations which irresolvably and tragically conflict. I find this idea disheartening, at the very least.

§4.3 Strategy 3: Rejecting 'ought' implies 'can'

We just considered a moral-dilemma-based objection to (3), according to which, in certain cases, one ought to do something even though one cannot do so *without there being*

²³ REF. See also Castañeda (1975, 196-197).

conclusive reasons to do otherwise. According to a perhaps more important type of objection to (3), there are some cases in which one ought to do something even though one *cannot do so*, full stop. To countenance such cases is to reject OIC, the ‘ought’ implies ‘can’ principle clarified in §3.4. Recall that ‘can’ here refers to the combination of specific ability and opportunity.

Now, one worry for OIC is determinism. One might think that if it is causally determined that one will not in fact do something, then, even if one has the specific ability to do it, one lacks the opportunity. One might also think that, often, people ought to do what they will not in fact do. Together, these ideas imply that OIC is false: in some cases, one ought to do what one cannot do. Much ink has been spilled on this worry, to which I will not add.²⁴ OIC requires either that determinism is false or that opportunity to do what will not in fact occur is consistent with determinism. For the purposes of this paper, let us assume this disjunction is true. Defending it would take us unnecessarily far afield from 1 Th. 5:17; besides, others have done so more ably than I can.²⁵

Importantly, even those who reject OIC tend to accept that, in *some* cases, being unable to do something implies one is not obligated to do it. For example, while Armstrong admits Jones’ being tied up implies he is not obligated “to get the police”, he insists this is not because OIC is true in general but rather because it is “a substantive moral truth that some kinds of moral judgments with ‘ought’ are not true when the agent cannot do the act” (1984, 254). Indeed, OIC’s popularity might be hard to explain unless this “substantive moral truth” holds in *most* cases, at least. This brings to the fore the question of whether it holds in the case of praying without ceasing. If it does, then even if OIC is false in its generality, we should be confident that a suitably tailored modification of (3) would do all the work we need it to do.

²⁴ REF
²⁵ REF

Thankfully, there is a way to gain leverage on whether inability precludes obligation in the case of praying without ceasing. For, in addition to the determinism-based objection to OIC, specific kinds of cases have been offered as counterexamples to OIC. If it is plausible to think the case of praying without ceasing is relevantly similar to these cases, and so itself a counterexample to OIC, we will have some reason to think (3) is both false and irreparable. But if not, we will have some reason to think that, even if OIC is false in general, (3) could be suitably restricted.

Consider these cases:

Larry gets on a plane to New York thirty minutes prior to his 11am wedding to Leslie in Los Angeles. It does not follow that, because Larry is unable at 10:45am to be at his wedding at 11am, he no longer ought to be there at 11am.²⁶

Jordan's memories of his grandmother are mainly negative, but for morally irrelevant reasons. At her funeral, Jordan learns she was single-handedly responsible for keeping his family financially afloat during his childhood. Jordan ought to feel gratitude. But he finds himself unable.²⁷

Though there is ongoing debate over whether these cases really tell against OIC,²⁸ we shall restrict our focus to the question of whether the case of praying without ceasing is relevantly similar to them.

Larry culpably made himself unable to get to his wedding on time. The question, then, appears to be whether we have culpably made ourselves unable to pray without ceasing. Recall Prayerful Nun from §3.4. *Modulo* gaining a few skills, we have both the specific ability and opportunity to imitate Prayerful Nun. For this reason, the only sense in which we may have culpably made ourselves "unable" to pray without ceasing is our having taken on more commitments than Prayerful Nun has. But, for at least many of us, we are *not* culpable for having

²⁶ See Sinnott-Armstrong (1985).

²⁷ See White (1975, 148).

²⁸ Vranas (2007), e.g., defends OIC in light of these two kinds of cases.

taken on those additional commitments. Besides the great work of prayer, Prayerful Nun's other work was menial, and she remained single. Non-menial work, family life, etc., are not wrong. So, if we are "unable" to pray, in this sense, it is not, at least in general, because we have *culpably* made ourselves so.

Next consider whether praying without ceasing is akin to gratitude we ought to have but cannot. Worth mentioning here is that immediately preceding 1 Th. 5:17 is verse 16: "rejoice always". While I suspect that rejoicing is distinct from feeling joy, suppose for the sake of argument that verse 16 implies we ought to always feel joy. Perhaps, moreover, we ought to always feel joy even though, given the limitations of our current, pre-resurrected human frame, we cannot do so. Similarly, Jordan's limitations make him unable to feel gratitude even if he wants to. In these cases, given that the 'ought' at issue is not that of general desirability but *agential*, to recall the distinction from §3.2, it seems that the practical point of the (purported) fact that the agent ought to have the relevant feeling could only be that there is an *ideal* towards which they are to strive for and incrementally approach, despite never being able to achieve it.

Perhaps, similarly, we ought to pray without ceasing even though, given the limitations of our current, pre-resurrected human frame, we cannot do so. And perhaps the practical point of this fact is that there is an ideal toward which we are to strive for and incrementally approach, despite never being able to achieve it. To visualize the ideal, we might imagine someone whose capacities are expanded to the point where, even when engaged in difficult mental work, she simultaneously and effortlessly prays.

By my lights, this objection to (3) has some promise. It has a cost, though. There are plenty of things I ought to do which I *can* do. To speak for myself, it is *hard enough* to do these consistently. So, if I am to choose between putting more effort into doing more of what I can do,

on the one hand, and striving for what I can never achieve, on the other, I will – rationally, I suspect – prefer the former. Of course, among what I can do might be steps of approach to the unreachable ideal. But what seems most helpful are imperatives mapping out the approach. So, if all I can do is pray *daily*, though not without ceasing, I find it most helpful to focus on praying daily. That, again, may be hard enough. If all this is right, the envisaged interpretation of the point of 1 Th. 5:17 has a cost. It threatens to leave 1 Th. 5:17 less uniquely motivating and helpful than we might have thought.²⁹

§4.4 *Strategy 4: We together can pray without ceasing*

To this point, we have taken ‘we’ and ‘us’ in (1)-(5) to refer to each of us, taken individually. But perhaps 1 Th. 5:17 is addressed not to us individually but to us *collectively, as a group*.³⁰ Perhaps, that is, praying without ceasing is a *collective action*, one no individual can perform by themselves. Perhaps, in this sense, it is like barn-raising.

In the original Greek, 1 Th. 5:17 is ἀδιαλείπτως προσεύχεσθε. The word translated ‘pray’, προσεύχεσθε, is second person *plural*, i.e., ‘you all pray’. This could mean either ‘each of you pray’ or ‘you all together pray’. While contemporary Western ears are most attuned to the former, the early church was significantly more group oriented.³¹ So, the latter meaning may well have been heard more easily in Paul’s time. Intensive group prayer was the norm in the early church (see Acts 1:14; 12:12), and the Lord’s Prayer, we should not forget, begins with ‘Our Father’, not ‘My Father (Mt. 6:9). In his commentary on 1 Th. 5:17, Aquinas approvingly quotes the lives of the fathers, who say that “he who gives alms is the one who always prays, for

²⁹ As another purported counterexample to OIC, Blum (2000) gives the case of addiction: for example, one with kleptomania still ought not steal, even if they cannot help it. But I suspect what we have already said applies to this kind of case, as well. An inveterate, irreparable kleptomaniac is limited. So, it seems the point of the (purported) fact that they ought not steal could only be that there is an ideal they can, perhaps, incrementally approach, though never achieve. Once again, the cost of interpreting the point of 1 Th. 5:17 on this pattern is the threat that Paul’s words become less uniquely motivating and helpful than we might have thought.

³⁰ REF

³¹ On this point, see, e.g., Hellerman (2001, 2009, 2017).

the person who receives alms prays for you even when you are asleep” (1969). The thought here is that we can coordinate with others to together pray without ceasing even though we individually cannot. And it is a thought that has been put into action. Groups such as the International House of Prayer in Kansas City organize 24/7 prayer rooms with sign-up slots for each hour of the day, some of which have run continuously since 1999.³²

Suppose we read 1 Th. 5:17 in this way. Then, plausibly, (4), which says we cannot pray without ceasing without there being conclusive reasons to do otherwise, is false. *We can*, just *together*, leaving us as individuals plenty of time to keep up with our work, friends, and families.³³

This is a fascinating neutral strategy. But it has at least three distinct costs. First, elsewhere Paul tells us to imitate him as he imitates Christ (1 Cor 11:1), and at times he can be read as indicating that he *individually* prays without ceasing, as when he tells the Romans that “without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers” (Rom. 1:9-10).

Second, and perhaps most importantly, is the difficulty of specifying the group(s) which are to pray without ceasing, as well as how many individuals in a given group must be praying at any given time. If the group is the whole church invisible and only one individual need be praying, then, for nearly all of us at nearly all times, nothing whatsoever must be done to ensure 1 Th. 5:17 is obeyed. That one successful 24/7 prayer room suffices. This makes obedience far too easy, by my lights.

³² See, for example, <<https://www.24-7prayer.com/>> and <<https://www.ihopkc.org/prayerroom/about-the-prayer-room/>>. See also <<https://www.gotquestions.org/prayer-vigil.html>> for an explicit appeal to 1 Th. 5:17 in this context.

³³ An intriguing variant of this neutral strategy can arguably be found in Murray, who holds that if we trust Jesus, he is “surety for our praying without ceasing” since he takes us “up into the fellowship of His own prayer-life before the Father” so that we “take part in His work of intercession”, which is “never-ceasing” (1953, 176-177). The group or groups that pray without ceasing, on this flavor of the view, are perhaps each of the pairs that have a believer and Jesus as members, or perhaps the church as a whole, Christ as its ever-praying head.

On the other hand, if there is more than one group which must pray without ceasing, or more than one individual per group, it is unclear how to specify these groups and these numbers. Perhaps the only principled proposal is to stick with one individual per group and specify that the relevant group must be one's local Christian community. But this threatens to make obedience too hard. Imagine a small community and an emergency situation requiring immediate action. That situation might well be a conclusive reason for precisely *no* member of that community to pray at the relevant moment, which means that they cannot pray without ceasing without there being conclusive reasons to do otherwise, after all. In general, there is a dilemma. Make the group too large, and obedience is too easy. Make the groups smaller in anything like a natural way, and obedience can be too difficult.

Third, and finally, is a more intuitive difficulty. Suppose that I am a devoted spreadsheet-wielding proselyte and administrator for a 24/7 prayer room for my local church, ensuring its continual use. But suppose that I, myself, *never* pray. On the interpretation of 1 Th. 5:17 at issue, it seems I am in full obedience to Paul's words, much as a project manager for a construction site may fulfill all their duties without ever hammering in a nail. It is hard for me to believe, though, that I am truly obeying Paul's words, in this case.

§4.5 *Strategy 5: Getting precise about 'without ceasing'*

According to the Gricean maxim of quality, when interpreting what others mean, we should usually assume they have the goal of making a contribution "that is true" (Grice 1989, 45-47). Applied to imperatives, this kind of maxim would have us expect others have the goal of communicating *correct* imperatives. With this in mind, perhaps there is an understanding of ἀδιαλείπτως, standardly translated as 'without ceasing', on which it becomes clear that we can

indeed pray without ceasing without there being conclusive reason to do otherwise, i.e., on which it becomes clear that (4) is false.

According to Barry C. Black, ἀδιαλείπτως “doesn’t mean nonstop” but instead “constantly recurring” (2015). Outside of Scripture the word referred to, e.g., a bad cough (Moulton and Milligan 1914, 9), which constantly recurs, sure enough, but is not strictly nonstop. And it seems we can indeed pray constantly recurringly without there being conclusive reasons to do otherwise. For it is enough, e.g., to spend a few minutes praying before bed each and every night. It is even enough to do this once a week, or month, etc., so long as one stays consistent.

It is unclear whether Black’s move works. ἀδιαλείπτως derives from an adverbial form of διαλείπω, meaning ‘cease, stop’, together with the negating α, kin the ‘a’ in ‘atheism’ (Aland and Aland 1998, 43). Thus, the word is plausibly thought of as the Greek equivalent of an adverbial form of ‘nonstop’ – i.e., ‘nonstopingly’. It is not without reason that Aland *et al*’s (1998, 3) dictionary has ‘constantly, always’ for the word, Arndt and Gingrich (1952, 17) have ‘constantly, unceasingly’, and many translations of the NT have similar. And tellingly, the church fathers did not argue for an undemanding gloss on ἀδιαλείπτως, but instead, as we saw in §1, felt pressure to expand our notion of prayer. We can gage how willing we are to insist that, in this instance, they had an inadequate grasp of the Greek. Surely there is nothing to worry about if we can obey 1 Th. 5:17 simply by praying once every month.

So, let us approach things from a different angle. ‘Without ceasing’ is a temporal adverb, modifying how the verb relates to time.³⁴ ‘Always’, often listed for ἀδιαλείπτως in dictionaries in

³⁴ Technically ‘without ceasing’ is an adverbial phrase. But it is a translation of an adverb, ἀδιαλείπτως, so I shall ignore this point.

addition to ‘without ceasing’, is a more common temporal adverb and perhaps better understood.

Consider

- (a) Zoe always studies.
- (b) Zoe is always studying.

Jóhannsdóttir (2007, 158-159) argues for the following picture of how ‘always’ works in (a) and (b). In (a), ‘always’ quantifies over a certain domain of times. In normal contexts, this domain is restricted, e.g., to all and only the study-suitable times nearby each class and exam. (a), then, says at each time in this domain, Zoe studies. By contrast, (b) simply means that Zoe studies *a lot*, there being no particular domain over which ‘always’ universally quantifies. Put differently, while ‘always’ is an *adverb of quantification* in (a), it is a *frequency adverb* in (b).³⁵

Guided by the Gricean maxim, perhaps we should take ἀδιαλείπτως to be frequency adverb. Then what 1 Th. 5:17 tells us to do is pray *a lot*, which, it seems, we can do without there being conclusive reason to do otherwise.

However, it seems ἀδιαλείπτως is not a frequency adverb.³⁶ First, it appears that ‘always’ functions as a frequency adverb in (b) due to the *aspect* of the verb phrase: it is present *continuous* (*is always studying*) rather than *simple present* (*always studies*). By contrast with English, Greek verbs in present form are identical whether the aspect is simple or continuous, making context alone determinative of aspect. Given the absence of translations of 1 Th. 5:17 akin to ‘*be praying without ceasing*’, it seems that, as this verse’s context is standardly understood, the aspect of the verb is simple, not continuous. And if that is right, then, on Jóhannsdóttir’s view, ἀδιαλείπτως is an adverb of quantification, not a frequency adverb.

³⁵ Lewis (1998) shows that not all adverbs of quantification quantify over *times*, as opposed to events or relationships or cases. But the adverbs which will concern us quantify over times.

³⁶ For helpful discussion, I thank Ralph Wedgwood, though I suspect I put a few things differently than he might.

Second, Paul had strong and clear frequency adverbs at his disposal had he wanted them – e.g., *πολλάκις*, which means ‘often’ or ‘a lot’, and which occurs much more often in the New Testament than *ἀδιαλείπτως*.

Third, and most tellingly, consider the immediate context of 1 Th. 5:17, i.e., verses 16-18a, below in Greek and English:

¹⁶ πάντοτε χαίρετε· ¹⁷ ἀδιαλείπτως προσεύχεσθε· ^{18a} ἐν παντὶ εὐχαριστεῖτε
¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ^{18a} give thanks in all circumstances

πάντοτε (translated here as ‘always’) and *ἐν παντὶ* (translated here as ‘in all circumstances’) are *explicit* adverbs of quantification. Plausibly, *ἀδιαλείπτως* is meant to parallel these adverbs. If so, it is best read as an adverb of quantification, as well.

I shall henceforth assume that *ἀδιαλείπτως* is an adverb of quantification. Even so, perhaps the Gricean maxim should lead us to sensibly restrict the domain of times over which it universally quantifies. For comparison, except in some extraordinary context, ‘Everything is on sale’ is best *not* interpreted as implying that the Pacific Ocean is on sale.³⁷ Instead, ‘everything’ quantifies over, e.g., the purchasable items in the relevant store. Perhaps something similar holds of *ἀδιαλείπτως* in 1 Th. 5:17.³⁸

Begin with the following domain of times:

PF all times *t* such that, in relation to the agent, *t* is either the *present* or a *future* moment at which the agent exists

PF seems too expansive. *PF* includes times when the agent is asleep. But, plausibly, 1 Th. 5:17 addresses the waking. So, consider

³⁷ This kind of point is somewhat common. For an example, see Stanley and Szabo (2000, 235-236). Stanley and Szabo also address the question of whether the issue is one of semantics or instead pragmatics, which is a question that would take us too far afield.

³⁸ For discussion of how imperatives relate to times, see especially Hamblin (1987), though he does not explicitly address the issue of imperatives with embedded adverbs of quantification. Indeed, while there appears to be a significant literature on adverbs of quantification in indicative statements, with Lewis (1998) as a *locus classicus*, there does not appear to be as much attention given to such adverbs in imperative sentences. The assumption may be that the issues are exactly parallel. We shall not have the opportunity to evaluate that assumption.

PFA the subset of *PF* in which the agent is *awake*

Prayerful Nun, from §3.4, prays at each time within *PFA*. What our discussion in §3.4 showed is that the problem is not necessarily that one lacks the specific ability and opportunity to pray throughout *PFA*. Rather, the problem is that, at many of these times, there are conclusive reasons for one to do otherwise.

It will not do to restrict *PFA* to

PFAO the subset of *PFA* in which the agent *ought* to pray

For it is completely trivial to be told to pray whenever we ought. We can just as sensibly be told to take cocaine or fire nuclear warheads whenever we ought. Presumably, this would be *never*. Likewise, 1 Th. 5:17 so interpreted could be correct even if we ought *never* pray. Paul's words, though, are not trivial in this way.

Consider next

PFAP the subset of *PFA* in which it is *permissible* for the agent to pray

PFANCR the subset of *PFA* in which there are *no conclusive reasons* for the agent to do otherwise than pray

I take it that *PFAP* and *PFANCR* are coextensive, for, plausibly, times in which it is permissible to pray are exactly those times in which there are no conclusive reasons for one to do otherwise. This interpretation of 1 Th. 5:17 fails, too. Given (2), according to which correct proper imperatives ought to be obeyed, 1 Th. 5:17 is correct only if we *ought* to do what it tells us to do. To learn we ought to pray whenever permissible is simply to learn that it is never *merely* permissible to pray: at each time in *PFA*, either there are not merely sufficient but *conclusive* reasons to pray, or else there are conclusive reasons to do otherwise. But then 1 Th. 5:17 so understood is ultimately as trivial as the interpretation in terms of *PFAO* (*O for ought*). For it can be correct even if there are *always* conclusive reasons to do otherwise than pray.

Consider, finally,

PFAP the subset of *PFA* in which the agent is “free” or “has to themselves”

But, on this interpretation, 1 Th. 5:17 is no longer the challenge to us it is surely meant to be.

Unaware of my workaholism, I may pack my schedule so full that I have no “free” time, no time “to myself”. It does not follow that I have thereby prayed without ceasing. Rather, to pray without ceasing, I would need to make some changes.

I still take this Gricean-inspired strategy to be promising. I have not shown that *no* suitably restricted domain could pull off the trick. But specifying it will take some ingenuity, at least. And perhaps it cannot be done. A needle must be threaded between a dilemma. Allow the domain to be wide, as with *PFA* (*present and future times during which one is awake*), and there will be many times during which there are, intuitively, conclusive reasons to do otherwise than pray. Attempt to narrow the domain, as with *PFAO* (*times one ought to pray*), *PFAP* (*times it is permissible for one to pray*), *PFANCR* (*times when there is no conclusive reason to do otherwise than pray*), and *PFAP* (*times one has “free” to pray*), and the danger, if my argument is on track, is that 1 Th. 5:17 is trivialized.

§5 Conclusion

As I mentioned in §1, from Origen to MacArthur, account-based strategies predominate. Such strategies essentially involve an account of the true nature of prayer. In this paper, I have identified and explored five neutral strategies. Each strategy in §4.1-5 is consistent with the idea that prayer is, say, nothing but petition. But it is also true that each comes with non-negligible costs, if my arguments are on track.

It seems *ad hoc* to insist 1 Th. 5: 17 applies only to nuns or others specially situated for the task (*Strategy I*). And unless we are prepared to countenance the possibility that God and

Nazi officers alike are ultimately responsible for irresolvable and tragically conflicting obligations, we probably should not hold that we ought to pray without ceasing even if we have conclusive reasons to do otherwise and so *also* ought to do otherwise (*Strategy 2*).

I take the next three strategies we explored to have more promise. But they also have costs. It might be that praying without ceasing is itself a counterexample to OIC, making the practical point of 1 Th. 5:17 the thought that there is an ideal prayer-life toward which we are to strive for and incrementally approach, despite never being able to achieve it (*Strategy 3*). But this threatens to make 1 Th. 5:17 less uniquely motivating and helpful than we might hope, given that it might well be hard enough to consistently do what we *can* do among the things we ought to do (e.g., pray *daily*). By the way, this observation allows us to identify a desideratum for a strategy of response to (1)-(5), namely, that it preserves 1 Th. 5:17 as uniquely motivating and helpful.

It might also be that 1 Th. 5:17 is to be read as telling us together, as a group, to pray without ceasing (*Strategy 4*). And it might even be that, in an effort to get precise about ‘without ceasing’, clarifying which domain of times the phrase quantifies over will result in an imperative we can obey without there being conclusive reasons to do otherwise (*Strategy 5*). In both cases, though, as we saw, the strategy faces a dilemma. Make the group responsible for praying without ceasing small in anything like a natural way, e.g., by identifying it as one’s local community, and obedience to 1 Th. 5:17 can be too difficult. Leave it large, e.g., as the church invisible, and obedience is too easy. In the case of an individual, make the domain of times at which she is to pray wide, e.g., present and future times during which she is awake, and obedience is too difficult. But narrow the domain and, at least given the ways of narrowing it so far explored, obedience is made trivially easy. Thus, the general dilemma is that obeying 1 Th. 5:17 is either

too difficult or too easy, depending on the size of the group, for the one strategy, and the wideness of the domain of times, for the other.

We have then another desideratum for a strategy of response to (1)-(5): casting Paul's words as neither too difficult nor too easy to obey. A good question, of course, is what it *means* for them to be neither too difficult nor too easy. I take it that obedience should be both do-able and challenging. (*Another* good question is what *this* amounts to, of course. But we shall have to leave it at that, for now.)

By my lights, it is quite natural to desire, of a strategy of response to (1)-(5), that Paul's words are uniquely motivating and helpful in its hands, as well as neither too difficult nor too easy to obey, but instead both do-able and challenging. So, insofar as these desiderata cause trouble for the most promising neutral strategies, we can sympathize with Origen *et al*, who found account-based strategies compulsory. And insofar as we sympathize with their perspective, we would do well to remember Tugwell's warning, discussed in §2. Account-based strategists must face up to the temptation to begin with one's life as already arranged and conceiving of prayer as something which must be able to fairly easily characterize the entirety of that life, whether or not prayer, so construed, is truly prayer in any intuitively recognizable sense. So, if we are not getting off the boat at a neutral strategy, and instead set on an account-based one, we must add this desideratum: that our account of prayer is really an account of *prayer*, and not something else.

I would like to sound some notes of hope for account-based strategies. The account-based strategies mentioned in §2 were quite summarily set aside. One or more may, with development, emerge as more plausible than initially seemed. In addition, I take the following two passages,

the first from *The Way of a Pilgrim*, the second from Spurgeon's sermon, to be suggestive of rather promising account-based strategies:

[A] Imagine that a...king commanded you to write an essay on some difficult subject in his very presence, at the feet of his throne. Now, no matter how completely engrossed you would be in your assignment, the presence of the king...would not allow you to forget even for a moment that you are not working alone... This very real awareness of the presence of the king clearly illustrates the possibility of praying even while one is engaged in mental work. (*The Way of a Pilgrim*, 152)

[B] It would be quite correct for me to say that I know a man who has been always begging ever since I have been in London; I do not think that I ever passed the spot where he stands without seeing him there. He is a blind person, and stands near a church; as long as my recollection serves me, he has been begging without ceasing. Of course he has not begged when he has been asleep; he has not begged when he has gone home to his meals; nor did you understand me to have asserted anything so absurd when I said he had begged without ceasing for years. And so, if at those times when it is proper for you to separate yourself from your ordinary labors; if you continue perseveringly begging at Mercy's Throne, it may be, with comparative correctness, said of you that you pray without ceasing. (C. H. Spurgeon, "Praying Without Ceasing", 4)

Notice how [A] and [B] differ. [A] assumes prayer requires "awareness" of God and emphasizes *peripheral* awareness. [B] suggests prayer is an activity that *stretches* through time in a certain way, including through times at which, perhaps, such "awareness" is entirely absent. [B] mentions begging. I prefer the analogy of hiking the Pacific Coast Trail. It seems I can be quite confident that my brother is hiking the Pacific Coast Trail right now even if, for all I know, at this moment, he is taking a much-needed rest. Perhaps, upon development, one or the other of these two account-based strategies will generate the perfect mixture: an understanding, based on an independently plausible account of prayer, according to which 1 Th. 5:17 is uniquely motivating and helpful, and neither too easy nor too difficult.

I began the paper by emphasizing the impact 1 Th. 5:17 has had. Even so, one might think a paper centered on *just three words* has, at best, a razor thin subject matter. But the topic

matters in respects I have not yet brought out. For one, 1 Th. 5:17 is not the only verse in Scripture which indicates prayer should entirely fill our lives. Paul in Eph. 6:18 urges us to pray “at all times in the Spirit”, and in Ps. 16:8, David describes how he has “set the Lord always before” him. For another, other religions contain imperatives similar enough to 1 Th. 5:17 that, plausibly, arguments paralleling (1)-(5) can be run. Consider, for example, the emphasis in the *Maha Rahulovada Sutra* that “mindfulness of breath is practiced continuously”.³⁹ Insight into praying without ceasing may also yield insight into these other practices, as well. Finally, it seems to me that, depending on one’s views about religion, the understanding we stand to gain about praying without ceasing may directly bear on daily life.

³⁹

REF

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aland, Kurt, and Barbara Aland, eds. 1998. *The Greek New Testament*. 4., rev. Ed., [4. Dr.]. Stuttgart: Dt. Bibelges. [u.a.].
- Anonymous. 1978. *The Way of a Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues His Way*. Translated by Helen Bacovcin. New York: Image Books.
- Aquinas. 1947. *Summa Theologica*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Benziger Bros.
- Aquinas, Thomas. 1969. *Commentary on Saint Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians*. Translated by Michael Duffy. Albany, N.Y.: Magi Books, Inc.
- Arndt, William, and Wilbur Gingrich. 1952. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Black, Barry C. 2015. "Can One Truly 'Pray without Ceasing?'" *Washington Times*, 2015. <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/nov/29/power-of-prayer-can-one-truly-pray-without-ceasing/>.
- Blum, Alex. 2000. "The Kantian versus Frankfurt." *Analysis* 60 (3): 287–88.
- Broadie, Alexander. 1972. "Imperatives." *Mind*, New Series, 81 (322): 179–90.
- Cassian, John. 2015. "The Conferences of John Cassian." In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series, Volume XI Sulpitius Severus, Vincent of Lerins, John Cassian*, edited by Philip Schaff. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library.
- Castañeda, Hector-Neri. 1975. *Thinking and Doing*. Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company.
- Cohen, Yishai. 2018. "An Analysis of Recent Empirical Data on 'Ought' Implies 'Can.'" *Philosophia* 46 (1): 57–67. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11406-017-9892-2>.
- Dorschel, Andreas. 1989. "What Is It to Understand a Directive Speech Act?" *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 67 (3): 319–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048408912350161>.
- Farrington, Debra. 2002. *Unceasing Prayer: A Beginner's Guide*. Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press.
- Fischer, John Martin. 2003. "'Ought-Implies-Can', Causal Determinism and Moral Responsibility." *Analysis* 63 (3): 244–50.
- Frankfurt, H. G. 1969. "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility." *The Journal of Philosophy* 66 (23): 829–39.
- Graham, P. A. 2011. "'Ought' and Ability." *Philosophical Review* 120 (3): 337–82. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00318108-1263674>.
- Grice, H. P. 1989. "Logic and Conversation." In *Studies in the Way of Words*, 22–40. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Grudem, Wayne. 1994. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press and Zondervan Publishing House.
- Hamblin, C.L. 1987. *Imperatives*. New York: Basic Blackwell Ltd.
- Hellerman, Joseph H. 2017. "Is Group-First Christianity A Trans-Cultural Value?" *The Good Book Blog* (blog). 2017. <https://www.biola.edu/blogs/good-book-blog/2017/is-group-first-christianity-a-trans-cultural-value>.
- Henne, P., V. Chituc, F. De Brigard, and W. Sinnott-Armstrong. 2016. "An Empirical Refutation of 'Ought' Implies 'Can.'" *Analysis* 76: 283–90.
- Jóhannsdóttir, Kristín M. 2007. "Temporal Adverbs in Icelandic: Adverbs of Quantification vs. Frequency Adverbs." *Nordic Journal of Linguistics* 30 (2): 157–83. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0332586507001734>.

- Jørgensen, Jörgen. 1937. "Imperatives and Logic." *Erkenntnis* 7: 288–96.
- Kment, Boris. 2017. "Varieties of Modality." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/modality-varieties/>.
- Lewis, David. 1998. "Adverbs of Quantification." In *Papers in Philosophical Logic*, 5–20. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- MacArthur, John. 2011. *Alone with God: Rediscovering the Power and Passion of Prayer*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: David C Cook. https://www.amazon.com/Alone-God-Rediscovering-Passion-MacArthur/dp/0781405866/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=alone+with+god+macarthur&qid=1561131606&s=gateway&sr=8-1.
- McHenry, Janet Holm. 2005. *PrayerStreaming: Staying in Touch With God All Day Long*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: WaterBrook Press.
- Mizrahi, Moti. 2009. "'Ought' Does Not Imply 'Can.'" *Philosophical Frontiers* 4 (1): 19–35.
- Moulton, James Hope, and Milligan, George. 1914. *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*. London: Hodder and Stoughton. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.31175012056175>.
- Mounce, William D. 2003. *Basics of Biblical Greek*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan.
- Murray, Andrew. 1953. *With Christ in the School of Prayer*. Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Company.
- Origen. 1947. *On Prayer*. Translated by William A. Curtis. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library.
- Piper, John. 2004. *When I Don't Desire God: How to Fight For Joy*. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books.
- Ross, W. D. 1930. *The Right and the Good*. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company.
- Simsic, Wayne. 2000. *Pray Without Ceasing: Mindfulness of God in Daily Life*. Winona, Minnesota: Saint Mary's Press.
- Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter. 1984. "'Ought' Conversationally Implies 'Can'." *The Philosophical Review* 93 (2): 249–61. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2184585>.
- . 1985. "'Ought to Have' and 'Could Have.'" *Analysis* 45: 44–48.
- Spurgeon, C H. 1872. "Pray Without Ceasing." *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, no. 1039.
- Stanley, Jason, and Zoltan Gendler Szabo. 2000. "On Quantifier Domain Restriction." *Mind and Language* 15 (2&3): 219–61. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0017.00130>.
- Tugwell, Simon. 2010. "Prayer, Humpty Dumpty and Thomas Aquinas." In *Language, Meaning, and God: Essays in Honour of Herbert McCabe*, edited by Brian Davies. Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock Publishers.
- Vranas, Peter B. M. 2007. "I Ought, Therefore I Can." *Philosophical Studies* 136 (2): 167–216. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-007-9071-6>.
- Wedgwood, Ralph. 2013. "Rational 'Ought' Implies 'Can.'" *Philosophical Perspectives* 23: 70–92.