

# Instruction In The Westminster Standards

## The Historic Standards of Presbyterian Denominations

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### STUDIES IN THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

Q. 105. What do we pray for in the fifth petition?

A. In the fifth petition (which is, "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors") we pray, That God, for Christ's sake, would freely pardon all our sins; which we are the rather encouraged to ask, because by His grace we are enabled from the heart to forgive others.

**Scripture References:** Matt. 6:12. Ps. 51:1, 2, 7, 9. Dan. 9:17-19. Luke 11:4. Matt. 18:35.

#### Questions:

1. Why is the word "and" used in this petition?  
The word "and" is used to connect it to the former petition. We must realize our needs will not be supplied unless we are faithful to do something in regard to the confessing of our sins.
2. It is noted that some churches use the word "debts" and others use the word "trespasses" in the prayer. What is the difference?  
There is no difference between the two words. We are to understand by both of them our "sins" whether we are speaking of original, actual, or sins of commission, omission.
3. Is it possible for all of our sins to be forgiven?  
Yes, God's Word teaches: "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared." (Ps. 130:3, 4). All sins may be forgiven except the sin against the Holy Ghost.
4. Would it be possible for any man to forgive sin, or for man to be worthy of having his sin forgiven?  
Neither of the two are possible, for only God can forgive sin (Mark 2:7) and we have no merit of our own (See Larger Catechism Ques. No. 194).
5. Can we see a ground of our forgiveness in this petition?  
Yes, there is a ground of our forgiveness and it is an encouragement. The ground is that by His grace we will be enabled to forgive others and thus we are forgiven.
6. How can we know our sins are forgiven?  
We can know on the basis of the promises of the Word of God (Micah 7:18, 19).

## FORGIVING OTHERS

It is a truth from the Word of God that only God can forgive when we offend against Him. It is an equal truth from the Word of God that we have the responsibility of forgiving others. Alexander Pope said,

“Teach me to feel another’s woe,  
To hide the fault I see;  
That mercy I to others show,  
That mercy show to me.”

The ability we show to forgive others is an evidence of God’s forgiving us. And yet so many times in our lives we hear that “forgiveness” is a lovely idea as long as it is the “other fellow” that has to forgive! Some people will face us with all sorts of arguments against forgiveness. One will say, “Would you feel forgiveness toward the Gestapo if you were a Jew during the second World War?” Possibly C. S. Lewis answered it well when he said, “I am not trying to tell you what I could do—I am telling you what Christianity is. I didn’t invent it. And there, right in the middle of it, I find ‘forgiveness’. It says, ‘Forgive us our debts even as we forgive our debtors.’ ”

Augustine said, “We are further reminded well that the unforgiving temper, apart from all outward wrong, itself constitutes the sin of the unmerciful servant.” Possibly we need to remember what Paul said to help us to understand this matter of forgiveness. He said, “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.” (Col. 3:13).

We need to keep in our minds the basic principle that we cannot forgive unless we have been forgiven and our forgiveness towards others must be in keeping with the way we were forgiven by Him! His forgiveness of us was not based on anything good He saw in us. It was one that was characterized by graciousness, by compassion. He was merciful toward us and His love for us was long-suffering. Such should be our attitude toward our fellowmen.

Our method, however, usually is: “What a nerve Mr. Blank has! If he thinks I’m going to forget this! I’ll fix him!” But such an attitude is so contrary to the Word of God. If we are wronged by someone we should remember we deserve far worse. We were nothing and wronged God, but in His mercy He forgave us. In the matter of forgiveness we need to remember what He did for us and in regard to others have a short memory!

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