

Biblical Topics

Lord's Prayer – Fifth Petition

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

What does this mean?

We pray in this petition that Our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing by punishment. So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.

In this petition we admit the sins of which we are guilty and take responsibility for them. We cannot undo our sins nor can we make amends for them. Therefore we ask God to be merciful and forgive us. This includes sins of which we are not even aware.

- Psalm 19:12: Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.
- Luke 18:13: "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

If God were to count our sins against us, none of our prayers would ever be heard.

- Genesis 32:10: I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups.
- Luke 15:21: "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

Because God forgives us our sins, we promise to forgive those who sin against us. This does not mean that God should forgive us because we forgive others. This is simply a promise on our part. It goes beyond mere words. We will not only forgive but do good to those who have sinned against us.

- Matthew 18:21-22: ²¹ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" ²² Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

We do not merit forgiveness with God by forgiving our neighbor, but we certainly lose God's forgiveness if we refuse to forgive those who sin against us.

- Mark 11:25-26: ²⁵ And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

The above information is taken from: "Luther's Small Catechism" annotated by Edward W. A. Koehler.