

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

HAVING SEEN WHAT THE SCRIPTURES PRINCIPALLY TEACH US CONCERNING GOD, IT
FOLLOWS TO CONSIDER WHAT THEY REQUIRE AS THE DUTY OF MAN

QUESTION # 183.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #183. *For whom are we to pray?*

A. We are to pray for the whole church of Christ upon earth;¹ for magistrates,² and ministers;³ for ourselves,⁴ our brethren,⁵ yea, our enemies;⁶ and for all sorts of men living,⁷ or that shall live hereafter;⁸ but not for the dead,⁹ nor for those that are known to have sinned the sin unto death.¹⁰

Question 1—*For whom ought we to pray?*

Answer—Generally, we are to pray for all sorts of men, for Christians, Jews, Muslims, pagans, both noble and ignoble, 1 Tim. 2:1, 2. They are capable of God's grace and favor, and we are to desire it for them, Tit. 2:11. Yet, it is an unwarranted petition to pray for the salvation of all men particularly without exception, as though God would have mercy upon all, which is contrary to his revealed will, John 10:26; Matt. 13:42. Nonetheless, it is warranted that we pray not only for all sorts of men now living but also for those who shall live hereafter, 2 Sam. 7:29. Especially that they are made recipients of the grace of God, John 17:20.

Particularly: First, we may and ought to pray for ourselves, even as Jacob did for deliverance from the hand of his brother Esau, Gen. 32:11. Our preservation is in the hands of the Lord alone, Ps. 16:1. At his hand, we may expect both mercy and vindication in the face of a hostile world, Ps. 43:1.

Second, we ought to pray for our brethren, even those of Christian acquaintance, Jas. 5:16. If it is inquired what we are to understand by brethren, there are several considerations: 1.) It obviously applies to those who are such according to the known acceptance of the word, Gen. 42:32. 2.) It is sometimes taken for any near kinsman, for Abraham and Lot are called brethren, Gen. 13:8; yet, they were not sons of the same father, but uncle and nephew, Gen. 11:31. 3.) It describes those who are members of the same church and congregation, Col. 1:2. 4.) It is used of those of the same nation, or nationality, Acts 7:23. 5.) It may be used to describe those who make a profession of the same religion with ourselves, as well as those who show kindness unto us, Prov. 17:17.

¹ Eph. 6:18; Ps. 28:9.

² 1 Tim. 2:1, 2.

³ Col. 4:3.

⁴ Gen. 32:11.

⁵ Jas. 5:16.

⁶ Matt. 5:44.

⁷ 1 Tim. 2:1, 2

⁸ John 17:20; 2 Sam. 7:29.

⁹ 2 Sam. 12:21-23.

¹⁰ 1 John 5:16.

6.) It is sometimes taken in the largest sense, as comprising all those comprising mankind, who have the same nature with ourselves, 1 John 4:21. None, who are entitled to our love, pity, and compassion, are to be wholly excluded from our prayers, Jas. 1:27.

However, there is an increased obligation to those more nearly allied with us by stronger bonds than others, 1 Tim. 5:8. Thus, communion of prayers is a special benefit of Christian friendship and acquaintance, Col. 1:9. In it, we seek the divine blessings upon those who believe and may also request that they return the favor, 1 Thess. 5:23, 25. This obligation is increased for those who are of the place and congregation in which we live and are members, as those who share and participate mutually in that life, Acts 2:42-46. It is certain that if the captives at Babylon were to pray for that place wherein they lived, how much more ought Christians take an interest and pray for the place and congregation whereof they are members, Jer. 29:7. The better it be with them, it will be the better with you, and contrariwise, 1 Tim. 2:2. Again, this obligation is increased for those who are our families and near relations because the nearer the relation the more ought to be our concern before the throne of grace, as: 1.) Job, who was faithful in sacrificing for his family, Job 1:5. 2.) Elisha, who, as a master, prayed for his servant, 2 Kings 6:17. 3.) So, too, the servant of Abraham prayed for his master, Gen. 24:12. As superiors are blessed in and by their inferiors, so the inferiors are blessed in and by their superiors, Gen. 22:17, 18.

Third, we ought to pray for our enemies, Matt. 5:44. Although this be a hard thing to bring men to do, we have the express command of Christ, together with his example, Luke 23:34. This is imitated by the martyr Stephen, Acts 7:60. While there may be much selfishness in our praying for those that love us, the kindly concern that results in prayer for our enemies makes us more like God, Matt. 5:45.

Fourth, we ought to pray for the whole church of Christ upon earth, Eph. 6:18. To no party must we confine the communion of prayers, to whom God has not confined his grace, Ps. 28:9. By this church we are to understand all those who profess the faith of the gospel, especially those whose practice is agreeable to their profession, Gal. 6:16; and, in particular, all those religious societies who consent to walk in those ordinances whereby they testify their subjection to Christ as King of the saints, Phil. 3:3, 15-19. The particular members of which these societies consist, are, for the most part, unknown to us; so that we cannot pray for them by name, or as being acquainted with the condition and circumstances in which they are; yet they are not to be wholly disregarded, or excluded from the benefit of our prayers, Col. 2:1. It is a sad sign to be unaffected with the general state of the church, especially in her afflictions, Amos 6:6.

Fifth, we ought to pray for magistrates, 1 Tim. 2:1-3. This is not to be taken to mean that indiscriminate prayer ought to be offered for those that rule contrary to the requirement of being a minister of God, Rom. 13:4. Magistracy, being an ordinance of God, Rom. 13:1, 2; is to be circumscribed by his rules, 2 Sam. 23:3.

Sixth, we ought to pray for ministers, Col. 4:3. This is a necessary duty, as their work is exceedingly difficult, such that no man is able to bear unassisted, 2 Cor. 2:16. Besides, those who are most forward to tell the truth are most in danger of suffering from the unstable temper of professed friends, Gal. 4:16. So, too, they suffer enmity from the restless malice and violent opposition of open enemies, who bear hatred to Christ and his gospel, Acts 19:23-27. And, as they have these difficulties in discharging their duties, yet

they must give account to God for their faithfulness, which ought to be done with joy and not grief, Heb. 13:17, 18.

Question 2—*For whom ought we not to pray?*

Answer—Although we ought to pray for all sorts of men, we are not to pray for every particular man. So, in the case of those who are dead, we ought not to pray, as David refused, 2 Sam. 12:21-23. It is vain and useless, for those laid low by death are as the tree which falls, wherever direction it falls, it must lie, Eccl. 11:3. The dead have entered into an unalterable state in which our prayers are ineffectual, Heb. 9:27. We have neither precept nor promise about it, and it was raised upon the false opinion of purgatory, Luke 16:22-26.

Nor ought we to pray for those who are known to have sinned the sin unto death, 1 John 5:16. This sin, though very rare, is that which in its breach embraces blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, Mark 3:28, 29.