

Teach Us To Pray: Forgive Our Debts

Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:4; Exodus 23:25-26; Leviticus 25:8-10;

Leviticus 25:8-10, 23, 54-55; Micah 7:18-20; Isaiah 61:1-2; Luke 4:16-21

Sins or Debts?: When you read the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6, this line says, "*Forgive us our debts.*" However, in Luke 11 it says, "*Forgive us our sins.*" Why would one writer use "debts" while the other uses "sins"?

The word *debt* (Opheiléma in Greek) means that you have incurred a debt/obligation that you are not free from. You are bound by it. Matthew uses a financial metaphor likely because he was a tax collector. It is an analogy that would make sense to him.

The word *sin* (Hamartia in Greek) means to miss the goal or what you are aiming for. Luke was a great researcher and theologian and possibly a physician. He was also a Gentile, thus he would have been very interested in Jesus's role in forgiving sins.

However, they both use the same word in the instruction on how to pray...forgive.

What is Forgiveness?: *Forgive* (Aphes in Greek) means to cease or to come to an end. So we could say something like this: "*Forgive us when we miss the goal, as we forgive others who don't meet our expectations.*" or "*Forgive us what we owe, free us, as we release others from what they owe us.*"

Can you imagine what it would be like if everyone forgave each other for not meeting expectations? What would that be like? Eden perhaps?

Here is the rub though. I can forgive all day long. I can forgive those who are in debt to me, I can forgive those who wronged me, but not everyone is going to do the same in return. When we wrong someone, or when they wrong us, there is now a moral debt to God. They (or we) now owe God and need to do something to make things right.

Jubilee: This is a theme/concept with deep roots in the story line of the Hebrew scriptures that Jesus fulfilled. Debt and forgiveness is a way to view the entire story of Israel.

In Exodus, we see a covenant between a newly free nation of Israel from Egypt. They strike a deal with God. Read Exodus 23:25-26.

The Israelites were given a code and a set of laws to keep them loyal to God. At Mount Sinai, they were given a covenant. If they followed it, they would be given a piece of Eden and would be blessed. If they did not follow the covenant, they would be met with curses, sickness etc. Well, they broke covenant and were indebted to God (racked up debt) and paid for it with suffering.

There is a concept that is brought up to relieve or reset this debt. It's called the Year of Jubilee or year of release. This is a reenactment of Israel's first release/emancipation from slavery in Egypt (not of Israel's doing). It's a remembrance of God's promise to forgive.

Read Leviticus 25:8-10. During Jubilee all of your debts were forgiven by others. For example: if you owed money to someone and couldn't pay them, you or one of your family members could become a slave for a period of time in order to repay the debt. During Jubilee, the debt would be forgiven and you would get to return to your family.

The same was true with the land. If you couldn't pay your debts and you were in trouble, you could sell your land with the understanding that the property would eventually be returned back to you.

Why would God command this? It doesn't really seem fair to us, but it was like hitting a giant reset button for this nation. It kept the powerful from becoming too powerful, it helped to equal the playing field for resources. It was really a genius way to ensure fairness in the land.

God makes it very clear who the land actually belongs to. Read Leviticus 25:23, 54-55. The land, the people, the resources, the crops, all of it belongs to God. The people were just there to manage it fairly, and because God is the owner, nobody could truly buy or sell anything. Therefore, it is God's right to restore that which was lost, because He was merely lending it to them in the first place.

God's Pardon: Micah is a minor prophet in the Old Testament. The prophets of the Old Testament often warned the nation of Israelites when they were turning from God. In Micah 6, God surveys what He sees happening in Jerusalem before armies of Assyria arrive. God lists dishonest behaviors and violence. Their consequences involve invasion and exile... Again...

In Micah 7, he discusses pardon. God is faithful and won't stay angry forever. Read Micah 7:18-20.

The purpose of the covenant was for showing love to others and God. Righteousness has to do with living in right relationship with others. By violating others (dishonesty, etc referenced in Micah), Israel became indebted to God. Getting 'payback' involved invasion/exile/oppression. In this, forgiveness is not just between individuals but by definition is a dual relationship.

And what happens? Jerusalem falls to the Babylonian Empire. But God promises remained that He would one day bring right relationship... and He does through Jesus and the provision of grace.

Jesus's Role: Let's look at two scriptures. The first scripture is from the prophet Isaiah, the second scripture is Jesus quoting Isaiah. Think about what is missing in the passage in Luke.

Read Isaiah 61:1-2 and Luke 4:16-21. What did Jesus not read from Isaiah? *And day of vengeance of our God.* Jesus stops before He gets to this and then tells everyone that the scripture is fulfilled in their hearing.

Why would He leave this out? It is because He knew that it was going to be His role to take on all of our debt, all of our sin, and to stand in the gap for us.

Forgiving Others: So then the question becomes... If Jesus took on our sin and debt, then why does He tell us that our debts would only be forgiven if we forgive other's debts to us? Is this

right? Not exactly and here is why I think this. *It's not until you encounter God's forgiveness and grace that you can understand how to truly forgive others.* The more Grace you are given, the bigger your capacity becomes to forgive others. It is in right relationship with God that sparks your ability to forgive others.

That's the prayer. It's to remind us of how we are actually able to forgive those who have debts against us. Remember it all belongs to God. The reason God is offended is because of broken relationships. If you don't forgive, you are demonstrating you are incapable of experiencing what you say you have experienced with God' forgiveness.

Within the Hebrew storyline, forgiveness is not something merely between individual Israelites or between individual Israelites and God. It is social, communal, and covenantal. Remember humanity does not belong to me and to you. Humanity belongs to God. When we take advantage of someone, we have wronged God. It's not because He personally got his feelings hurt but because you mistreated His property.

Application: So how do we live this out? If you have ever experienced God's Grace, make things right with the person then go to God with sacrifice/humility/desire to surrender. Let Him teach you how to forgive, because you have been forgiven.

Discussion Questions:

- Read Romans 3:23. No one is without sin. We all owe a debt to God. Reflect on something in your life you need to make right with God or someone else.
 - What steps can you take to make things right?
 - Will it be something that can be handled in a short time or will it require time and prayer to work through?
 - If you can't think of anything right now, ask God to reveal your debt to you and give you the strength and courage to set it right.
- Read the parable Jesus told in Matthew 18:21-35. How does this story bring Matthew 6:14 to life for you?
- What are the implications of living a life with radical forgiveness? What does it involve? What does it not involve?

Reference:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjPsBfJhkfs&list=PLmPd5yRYbTid7ExFGv7i-Jxy8iuEJYuay&index=24>