

Matthew 6:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

Analysis

The prayer addresses spiritual debt: 'And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors' (Greek: ἀφες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν, 'forgive us our debts'). The term 'debts' (ὀφειλήματα) refers to moral obligations unfulfilled - sins are debts owed to God. The petition acknowledges ongoing need for forgiveness, not once-for-all salvation but daily cleansing. The phrase 'as we forgive' is crucial and troubling - it conditions divine forgiveness on human forgiveness. This is not earning salvation but demonstrating genuine repentance. Those who have truly experienced God's forgiveness extend it to others; unforgiveness evidences hardened hearts.

Historical Context

Debt was crushing reality in first-century Palestine, with debtor's prison and debt slavery common. Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:21-35) explicitly interprets this petition. Jewish thought recognized both vertical (sins against God) and horizontal (sins against others) dimensions of wrongdoing, requiring both divine and human forgiveness. The Jubilee principle (Leviticus 25) involved debt cancellation every fifty years, prefiguring the complete forgiveness Jesus offers.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does viewing sin as 'debt' shape our understanding of forgiveness as cancellation we cannot repay?
2. What is the relationship between receiving God's forgiveness and extending forgiveness to others?
3. Who in your life do you need to forgive as evidence of experiencing God's forgiveness?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	ἀφίεμεν	ἡμῖν	τὰ	ὀφειλήματα	ἡμῶν·	ώς	καὶ	ἡμεῖς
And	forgive	us	G3588	debts	our	G5613	And	we
G2532	G863	G2254		G3783	G2257		G2532	G2249
ἀφίεμεν	τοῖς	ὀφειλέταις	ἡμῶν·					
forgive	G3588	debtors	our					
G863		G3781	G2257					

Additional Cross-References

Ephesians 4:32 (Parallel theme): And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Mark 11:25 (Parallel theme): And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

Ephesians 1:7 (Parallel theme): In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

Colossians 3:13 (Parallel theme): Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

Luke 11:4 (Parallel theme): And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

Exodus 34:7 (Parallel theme): Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

Psalms 32:1 (Parallel theme): Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Luke 6:37 (Parallel theme): Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:

Psalms 130:4 (Parallel theme): But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.

1 Kings 8:39 (Parallel theme): Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men;)