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# Anything Against Anyone

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# 'Anything Against Anyone'

BY PAUL ANDERSON

**H**E GRIEVED her loss. Without a word, she'd walked out on him after eight years of marriage. He didn't even have a clue that the relationship had been growing intolerable for her. Sure, they had their problems, but didn't all relationships? It just caught him totally unaware, and now there was nothing he could do to retrieve, let alone rebuild the relationship. The way she left had not only put an end to what had been, but he felt it also closed the door to future possibilities. Her "No!" was final. Their future was nil. The investments they'd made in each other were now lost. Relational bankruptcy! Through the shock, the only thing he could feel was a dull sense of desperate pain—the sort of choking feeling you get when you try to swallow a couple of dry aspirin without water. He felt like weeping... if he could just remember how.

Another situation. Of all the years she and her friend had served together on church committees, of all the Bible studies they'd attended (and even organized together), of all the times they'd prayed for common concerns and for each other, she thought of them all and wondered how she could be betrayed like that. "Was it caused by hard feelings or by competition?" she asked herself. "Or maybe I did something to cause her cruel words." A friendship of twenty years had been damaged by one woman's careless comment about another. She didn't intend it to get back to her... but it did.

In another town. Like a bolt of pain in her stomach, the memory came again. She hadn't intended to get pregnant, or even to go that far before marriage, but things happened. Worse yet, when she

told her boyfriend the doctor's news, he backed out of the relationship. Wrong as she knew it was, she terminated the pregnancy, in secrecy, and had borne the pain in isolated anguish for years. But the pain keeps coming back... often when least expected. She had become a prisoner to an undesired past.

"Mommy, Bobby keeps picking on me!" complained the five-year-old.

These scenes, and a thousand more like them, assault our conscious moments. The joy of life itself becomes crowded out by hurt and anger, and when they cool, they calcify into bitterness. We can't avoid pain in life, but we can deal with it. Along with His example of forgiveness, Jesus offers us His teachings that set us free if we embrace them. In His most central teaching on forgiveness in Mark 11:25 (my translation) Jesus declares: "And when you stand praying, forgive if you have anything against anyone, in order that your Father also who is in heaven may also forgive you of your trespasses."

**I**N ANOTHER context, Peter objects, "Lord, just how often should my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus replies, "I say unto you, not just seven times... but seventy times seven." (Matthew 18:21f) In these ways the forgivingness expected of Jesus' followers is radically different from the ways we ought to seek forgiveness for ourselves. As we confess our faults and throw ourselves upon the mercy of God, or of another, we experience the joy of being forgiven. But Jesus calls us to be extenders of forgiveness *before* another asks it, and *regardless* of any guarantee against further violation. We forgive because Jesus invites us to do so.

In the Greek, the word for forgiveness literally means "to release," "to send away," "to let it go." For instance, in Matthew the word *aphiēmi* is rendered "they straightaway *let go* of their nets" (4:20), "*leave* your gift before the altar and first be reconciled to your brother" (5:24), "*release* to him also your cloak" (5:40), and "*forgive* us our debts as we *forgive* our debtors" (6:12). To forgive another is to release him or her from anything we may feel is owed us. But that involves risk, and the insecurity of it bombards our minds with questions:

"What if they don't know they've wronged us, or worse yet, what if they know it and don't care?" Jesus says, "Let it go."

**B**UT WHAT IF they see us as easy targets for future abuse? How do we become assured they won't do it again?" Jesus commands us, "Forgive."

"But how can I get over the pain? No matter how hard I try, I just can't shake the memory of that devastating experience." That's precisely why Jesus counsels us, "Come on now; release them back to God's love. I know you can't forget; that's why you *must* forgive. And you may have to do it twenty times a day, but just keep doing it until you are free, and they are too."

Forgiveness is central to the well-being of others, and to ours as well. The older we get, the more sensitized we become to the ways we trespass on the personal space and feelings of others. Jesus died to set us free from those debts, and he also gives us the grace to seek reconciliation were needed. But as far as our feelings about having been wronged by others go, Jesus invites us to take the initiative first, whether requested of us or not. In doing so, we release others from what we feel they owe us... and we become freed, ourselves. **EF**

**ABOUT THIS ISSUE:** Several of the articles develop the theme of "Forgiveness," but other themes are addressed as well. Take special note of the update on Evangelical Friends Missions and the announcement of our second annual "Publishers of Truth" essay competition.