



# Encouraging Words

with Darlene Sala

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## EXCUSING OR FORGIVING?

My friend Dr. Richard Smith tells of counseling a woman who had been gang raped as a teen. Although she was a believer and said she had forgiven the men, years later the trauma still haunted her.

"Oh what grounds did you forgive the men who raped you," Richard asked her.

"On the same grounds that Christ did," she replied: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'"

Richard writes, "What [she] did sounds nice and spiritual, even pious, but it is not forgiveness by God's standard." Then he writes something that we often forget: "God would have us forgive--not excuse. How do we excuse?" Richard lists phrases that we often use, such as *They are just human. They didn't know what they were doing. They lost control. They grew up in a terrible home.*

While these phrases possibly explain their behavior, they are not an excuse for sin. The sinner deserves to pay for what he or she did, however, it's up to God to see that justice is done on our behalf. Richard explains that "When we forgive, we are giving that other person over into God's hands..., trusting that God will...see that a payment for sin is made--either by that person or by Christ,"<sup>1</sup> who died for all of our sins on the cross.

Where are you in this process of forgiveness? Is your heart still full of anger and rage at what was done to you? Or can you put the matter in God's hands to see that justice is done?

"As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive" (Colossians 3:13), the Bible says. Right now you can pray this prayer with me: *Dear Lord, with all my heart I forgive that person who You know wronged me. I put him in Your hands--to punish or to show mercy. I realize I have no right to refuse to forgive when You have forgiven me. Amen.*

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Richard Smith, "Forgiveness: Fact & Fiction," *Insights* (Bland, VA: Cross Ministries, n.d.).