

Oneness in Christ

by Kelly T. Dixon

Scripture: Romans 12; John 17:9-11, 22-23

One of the most painful and hard to understand thing a Christian serving the Lord can experience is persecution. Especially when that persecution comes from a fellow Christian.

In Romans chapter 12 Paul tells us how we can be a living sacrifice for our Lord. When speaking on the subject of being a living sacrifice, it is inevitable that persecution must be addressed. With quite a bit of experience in this area, Paul tells us in Romans 12:4, *"If people persecute you because you are a Christian, don't curse them; pray that God will bless them."* (NLT) Many times we think of the persecutors Paul is referring to here as being unbelievers. After all, why would another Christian persecute you because you are a Christian? The answer is in their Christian walk. When believers aren't walking closely with God they can carry out a persecution against you that stings even greater than the unbeliever's persecution.

Yet, what is it that Paul says here *" . . . don't curse them; pray that God will bless them."* Was Paul out of his mind!? When we are persecuted we don't want God to bless them. We want curses - a lot of curses. A few of the ones the Lord bestowed upon prideful king Pharaoh when he wouldn't let God's people go - those would do the trick. But wait, Paul has a bigger picture in mind. The picture of oneness in Christ. The picture that goes beyond the hurt feelings, beyond the waves of revenge. The picture that demonstrates the love of Christ. This love that is so great it models the oneness which Jesus has with the Father.

When looking at the unbeliever that persecutes, we see the prayer of blessing here being the prayer for their salvation. You are praying that your Father will remove the scales from their eyes so they will see they need a savior. You are asking the Lord to bring them into His sheepfold. In doing so, He will be bringing them into the oneness of Christ.

The prayer of blessing for a believer is, however, quite different. They are already in the fold, they're just not walking closely with the Master. Your prayer is to bring them into oneness with the Father. Yet, as you pray this blessing upon your brother or sister in Christ, something amazing happens - you become even closer to the Father. This makes you and your fellow Christian draw closer to oneness together in Christ. It's putting Christ at the center - not self nor the actions that our selfish nature wants to bestow.

Oneness in Christ continued . . .

Jesus prayed for His disciples (and us today) in John 17. As part of that prayer He addresses the bigger picture of oneness. This is the picture that Paul is pointing us towards in Romans. In John 17:9-11 Jesus says,

"⁹My prayer is not for the world, but for those You have given Me, because they belong to You. ¹⁰All who are Mine belong to You, and You have given them to Me, so they bring Me glory. ¹¹Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to You. Holy Father, You have given Me Your name; now protect them by the power of Your name so that they will be united just as We are."

And in John 17:22-23 Jesus reiterates the point of being united as one by saying,

"²²I have given them the glory You gave Me, so they may be one as We are One. ²³I am in them and You are in Me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that You sent Me and that You love them as much as You love Me."

Did you pick up on that? Jesus has given us the glory that the Father gave Him! Why? So that **we** may be one as Jesus and the Father are - Jesus in us and the Father in Jesus **all** being perfected into one. What an awesome thought!

As a Christian who has been persecuted by other Christians, I know exactly how much it hurts. The pain can go deep down to your inner most soul, especially when you know you have done no wrong. You have only followed Christ. However, it is the Lover of your soul that doesn't want your soul to hurt. It is He who says come be one with Me and My Father and begin by praying for blessings to be bestowed upon your fellow brother and sister.

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