

## Pursuing Christ

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One of my children had hurt one of her sisters. As soon as I was told, I was angry and I immediately sprang to action. I can still hear my thoughts, "Where is she; we are going to deal with this right now!" I was in hot *pursuit*.

Have you ever been pursued? Folks say that when pursued, we have a natural 'fight or flight' response.

In a jealous rage King Saul threw a spear at David in hopes of killing him. King Saul's jealousy stemmed from David's popularity as Israel's beloved warrior. David fled Israel. However, King Saul discovered David's hideout and took his army to destroy him. He was in *hot pursuit* of David; the hunter in pursuit of the hunted. (Read about this in 1 Samuel 18-24.)

In scripture, *the one who is in pursuit of another* is technically called a 'persecutor.' In the Greek language this word described a hunter *in pursuit of* his prey, or someone who *avenged* the murder of another. As a legal term it described a *prosecutor*.

When "I" am the one being pursued, the terms 'persecutor' and 'prosecutor' seem quite fitting.

Jesus taught his followers:

**Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:44-45)**

An *enemy* is someone who is hostile toward you. They may not be carrying pitchforks and torches, wave swords, or fire guns; but they have turned against you. They may not physically chase after you, but they *persecute* you.

Jesus asked his disciples to do something that was unnatural and difficult. Today it is easy for Christians to simply make rationalizations and skip this teaching:

"Love my enemies!?!"

"Pray for those who are in hot pursuit of me!?!"

"Absurd! They don't deserve it! I'm the victim here."

"How can anyone be expected to accomplish such a teaching?"

It is likely that most of us are able to think of a time when we could have "technically" been described as a persecutor; perhaps like the illustration at the beginning of the article. I would also think that whenever we are in hot pursuit, we *believe* that we are justified in our action.

Now, consider this question:

Is it possible that when we have been persecuted, the persecutor *believes* they are justified? Even in a fit of jealous rage, it is possible that they just don't realize what they are doing?

These questions are raised, not to imply that an evil person is not responsible for their sin, but to lead us to the solution that Jesus chose:

**And when they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:33-34)**

He put into practice the very words he taught; Jesus, the *Son* of God. If we follow the example of Jesus we will become *sons* of our Father in heaven. When we set our gaze on the cross of Christ, we will have the strength and courage to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. May we *pursue* the character of Christ.

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