

OWNERSHIP

Jon Macon

No one would appreciate having their belongings stolen or misused by someone else. In our society, the rights of ownership are cherished and protected. Psalm 24:1-2 says, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods." God is Creator of all things, and everything therefore belongs to Him. And our Owner has rights over us. Although often overlooked, the principle of ownership is one of the most important doctrines taught in the Bible, especially as it pertains to God's relationship to man.

The principle of ownership

It is strictly up to the owner how his property is used. The laws God gave to Israel through Moses reflect the principle that the owner has full rights over his property, and nobody else may circumvent those rights. If someone's negligence caused another person's property to be damaged, full restitution had to be made to the property owner whose rights were violated (Exod 21:33-36; 22:5-6). Borrowers were also required to replace damaged property (Exod 22:14). Thieves had to restore from double up to five times the value of the property they stole or else lose their own freedom (Exod 22:1-4). In the New Testament, the principle of ownership is also seen in the case of Ananias in Acts chapter five. In Acts 5:4, Peter said to Ananias concerning his property: "*Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.*" Ananias had full authority to decide how his own property was used, including the money that he gained from the sale of his land. He did *not* have the right to lie to God about how much he sold the land for.

Ananias and Sapphira were thus struck dead for lying to the Holy Spirit about the amount of money they had obtained from selling their land (Acts 5:1-10). In Christ's parable in Matthew 20:15, the householder asked, "*Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?*" In the context of the parable, the lord of the vineyard owned the pennies that he gave to the laborers. Since it was his vineyard and his money, it was up to him what to do as he wished with his own belongings. This same principle of ownership applies to our relationship with God.

God the Owner

Although people live their lives as if they have no Creator, it does not change the fact that they still belong to God. Psalm 100:3 says, "Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; *we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*" We and the world we live

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(continued)

in belong to God because He made it all. It is essential that we remember that, and live our lives according to those facts. The pride of man is well described in Psalm 12:3-4: “The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things: who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; *our lips are our own: who is lord over us?*” Lots of people like to think of themselves as being free agents, beholden to no one. Yet Romans 6:16 teaches us that the only question is *whose slave will we be*, not whether or not we will be a slave: “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” Making ourselves the slaves of sin is a violation of the rights of God our Owner. In Ezekiel 18:4, the Lord says, “Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.” God was angry with Israel for taking what belonged to Him, including the lives of their children, and using them in a manner that was against the will of the Creator and Owner (Ezek 16:17-21). His people violated the Sabbath by doing their *own* ways, their *own* pleasure, speaking their *own* words, and not God’s (Isa 58:13-14). The Book of Isaiah begins with these words: “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. *The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.* Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward” (Isa 1:2-4). Even an animal knows who it belongs to, yet how many people do not consider that they belong to their Maker? As for us, we are owned by Christ in a double manner. First, he created us (John 1:1-3). Second, he died for us and purchased us with his own blood (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 7:23). Thus, we are *constrained* to live only for him and not for ourselves (2 Cor 5:14-15). Revelation 4:11 says, “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: *for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*” Being the Owner means that God has the right to tell us what to do every moment of our lives. This also means that we have no authority or right to live in any way other than what He, our Creator and Owner, has determined for us. We have no right to refuse Him. Therefore, let us live the rest of our time in the flesh not to the lusts of men, but to the will of God (1 Pet 4:2).