

Owning the Land

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What does it mean to “own” something? In an effort to define the word we might throw around some other words like “belong” and “possess” and maybe some possessive adjectives like “my” and “our”. Ownership means we have a vested interest in a thing. We are connected to the thing, and we also exert (or wish we could exert) a certain amount of control or influence over it.

So, what kinds of things can we own? We could name any number of objects that might be purchased—car, house, toys, food—and of course the money itself. And there are innumerable un-buyable things that we might own as well—this body, time, actions and ideas. And then we get into this weird world of quasi-ownership, where we use words like *my* and *our*, and yet we wouldn’t actually say (not out loud, at least) that we *own* these things—like *our* sports team; *my* country; *my* friends; *your* husband ... but then again, some people kind of act like they do own these things. You may even hear someone speak of “stealing ideas” or “stealing friends”.

Ownership is very much part of our culture, language, and even being human. Can you imagine what it would be like if we didn’t feel like we owned anything at all. If you couldn’t own your house, car, or clothes, then why pay money for it? And if you aren’t going to pay money to own anything, then why work for money? Why do anything at all if you experience nothing but detachment from ... everything. Would you root for a sports team or be happy that one or another team won if you didn’t feel some affinity for the home team? What if children didn’t belong to us? Would we still have children?

The two-part question of the day, then, is *should we embrace ownership, or should we try to let go of it?* I’ll tip my hand and give you a peak at the answer ... the answer is *yes*.

Let’s look at the first part: *Should we embrace ownership?*

When Jehovah called Abram to leave his country of Ur and go to a new land, Abram was promised the land of Canaan. That promise was kept alive for each new generation, going to Isaac, and then also Jacob. But Jacob—or Israel—and his family ended up in Egypt for 400 years. It wasn’t until after Moses led the Children of Israel through the wilderness that the promise was finally fulfilled. The Israelites regarded that land as their own, and even spoke possessively of the Lord Jehovah.

The Israelites’ sense of ownership for the land and even for their God had a Divine cause. They were told that the land would be an eternal possession—this is really the reason for their residence in the Holy Land today—and in the Old Testament stories, Jehovah refers to Himself again and again as “the Lord your God.” The ownership that Jehovah inspired in the Israelites was not simply to appease that group of people. It is just as important for us to have a similar sense of owning and possessing. In the work *Heavenly Secrets* we find this:

“The heavenly marriage is a relationship in which heaven (and so the church) is united to the Lord through its sense of self. In fact, heaven and the church are to be found in the feeling of independent existence, because without it there could never be union.” (252)

The Lord can only connect and unite with our sense of self, which in other translations may be called *the own*, or *the proprium*. The sense of self is what separates us and gives us independence from other individuals and even God, allowing us to love and be loved by them. This sense of self that we experience gives rise to and is directly responsible for our sense of ownership, for without a feeling of separation, ownership would mean nothing at all. We have a sense of self, or a proprium, and we feel like the things that we do, think, and feel are ours, and these are a gift from the Lord.

Let us now turn our minds to the second part of our two-part question of the day: *Should we try to let go of it?*

The Israelites were indeed promised the land of Canaan, but retaining possession of that land was conditional. In Leviticus it says this:

“You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations, lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you.” (18:26-28)

Retention of the Holy Land depended upon the Israelites following the Commandments. So they kind of owned the land ... and kind of didn't. We know, of course, who the real owner of the land is—it's the Lord. He states this clearly without mincing words: “The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me.” (Lev. 25:23). And psalmists speak to the Lord's ownership of everything with these beautiful words:

*The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness,
The world and those who dwell therein.
For He has founded it upon the seas,
And established it upon the waters. (Ps. 24:1-2)*

*For the Lord is the great God,
And the great King above all gods.
In His hand are the deep places of the earth;
The heights of the hills are His also.
The sea is His, for He made it;
And His hands formed the dry land. (Ps. 95:3-5)*

And I don't think I need to remind you of the *everything* that the Lord created in the first chapter of Genesis.

So, wait. The Lord wants us to feel a sense of ownership and that we are our own and our actions are our own ... but in reality, none of it is our own? That's exactly right. In New Church teachings, it says,

“The Lord unites us to himself by means of appearances. It does seem as though we ourselves loved our neighbor and did good and spoke the truth; and if it did not seem as though we were doing these things on our own, we would not love our neighbor, do good, or speak the truth, so we would not be united to the Lord. However, since love, goodness, and truth come from the Lord, we can see that it is through appearances that the Lord is uniting us to himself.” (Divine Providence 219.5)

Ask a child where electricity comes from, and they will say it is from the outlet. As clever adults, though, we know that it comes from an electrical generator, like hydroelectric or a power plant. The appearance is that an outlet provides electricity, when really, the outlet is merely a conduit.

And that's us. We are an outlet—a conduit. It appears as though we do everything on our own, and that love is created in our own hearts and then we share it with others, and ideas are generated in our brains, and they are all ours, and we make people happy ... and, in reality, we are an outlet. Don't lose heart, though. The outlets in your home are essential. And so are you. If you weren't essential to God's plan, you wouldn't be here. And that's the point, you are here for God's plan, in His creation, and you do matter.

In the parable of the talents, certain servants were given talents of money. (A quick linguistic sidenote here: Did you know that our English word *talent*, meaning *a special ability*, has this parable as its origin?) So, three servants were given money, each according to their ability. Two servants make good use of their talents, and one servant does not.

We are in the position of these servants. We have been given this life—some with more talents, and some with fewer—and we have been given all that we have. Are we going to make good use of it, resulting in us entering into the joy of our Lord, or are we going to squander it away, with the resulting weeping and gnashing of teeth?

Care must be taken in making use of these talents, though. In being granted control over these talents, as those servants were, it's easy to start to think that we own them. Instead of controlling our talents as an owner, though, it might be more suitable to think of ourselves as stewards of our talents, and of all that the Lord created around us. A steward is a manager of a house and is a servant to the owner of the house. A steward does make domestic decisions and helps things run smoothly, but a steward is not the owner.

You see, problems start to arise when we think of ourselves as the owners. We get upset when people don't do what we want them to do, including our friends, church, community, or spouse. We do this weird thing where we actually start to identify objects, people, and ideas with ourselves, so that if anybody says something against our sports team, or beliefs, or spouse, we get upset. Oh, but we should defend these things we care about from slander, shouldn't we? Well, it is one thing to speak up for something we care about, and it is yet another to get upset because we feel that we own it or have made it part of our *self*. It's a fine line that transitions into a slippery slope from "I care about this" to "I own this."

It *is* a fine line. It *is* hard to not feel ownership for the things that really *seem* to come from ourselves. We are always going to experience that control of ourselves, and it's difficult to let go of feeling the need to control what's on the outside. Our task, as regenerating humans, is to first *know* that it's all from the Lord, then to *acknowledge* that it's all from the Lord, and finally to *believe* that it's all from the Lord. The more we do this, the more we heed the Lord's command to be a blessing. "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing."

Amen.

Readings

Genesis 12:1-7. Now the Lord had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, From your family And from your father’s house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. So they came to the land of Canaan.

Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.” And there he built an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

Matthew 25:14-30. “For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord’s money. After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

“So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, ‘Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.’ His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’ He also who had received two talents came and said, ‘Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.’ His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’

“Then he who had received the one talent came and said, ‘Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.’

“But his lord answered and said to him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.

‘For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Heavenly Secrets 4151. No one ever has goodness and truth that is her or his own. Everything good and true flows into us from the Lord both directly and through communities of angels, but goodness and truth still seem to be ours. They appear to be ours so that we will adopt them as our own until we reach the stage where we know and then acknowledge and finally believe they are not ours but the Lord’s. The Christian world has learned from the Word that everything good and true comes from the Lord and that nothing good comes from humankind. In fact, the church’s teachings, which come from the Word, assert that on our own we cannot even attempt good, so we cannot will it, and therefore we cannot do it, since doing good results from wanting to. Belief comes entirely from the Lord, too, which means that we cannot have the least faith unless it flows in from the Lord.