

Ownership

I remember when I was very young – probably 6 or 7 – pondering about whether my parents owned me. My conclusion was that they did. I also remember the shock I felt when I found that one of my siblings had stolen a prized Kennedy half dollar from me. All in all, ownership was very important to me.

As I have gotten older, I find that I am not quite as concerned with ownership. Maybe it is because my spouse and children so freely use anything that might be considered mine. Maybe I've actually matured a little. However, there is one area where ownership still matters – and perhaps is still misunderstood.

Paul commented on this very eloquently in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 when he said:

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

I tend to think of myself as being my own possession. In fact, I am not mine. Whether I acknowledge the property rights or not, I belong to God. There are only two things which are mine, which God describes as “given” to me – my knowledge and my free will¹.

Part of the gift of agency is the ability to act as if I do not belong to God. I am allowed to use – or misuse – my time in any way I wish, subject to the consequences of my earlier decisions. I can accumulate earthly “possessions” to any degree I wish, subject to the same restrictions. However, the validity of my claim to those things is evident in their ultimate consequences – the use of my time only benefits me to the extent that I use it toward eternal life. My earthly possessions remain on God's earth after I die. All I take with me is the knowledge I have obtained, and who I have become through the exercise of my agency².

Interestingly enough, what sparked my recent thoughts on this subject are two passages of scripture which speak of something else we can own! First, Jacob 6:3.

1 See Moses 7:32

2 Dallin H. Oaks, “The Challenge to Become,” Ensign, Nov. 2000, 32

And how blessed are they who have labored diligently in his vineyard; and how cursed are they who shall be cast out into *their own place!* And the world shall be burned with fire.

Then, Doctrine and Covenants 88:32.

And they who remain shall also be quickened; nevertheless, they shall return again to *their own place*, to enjoy that which they are willing to receive, because they were not willing to enjoy that which they might have received.

In both cases I have added the emphasis. In my own note next to the passage in Doctrine and Covenants 84³ I have written “The last bastion of pride is Outer Darkness.” Ultimately, we can insist on ignoring our True Owner, and finally end up with something which is ours, but only because we were unwilling to receive what might have been given us. But of course, this points up another area in which we can receive, if we are willing to be joint-heirs with Christ⁴.

Since General Conference in October of 2002, when I seemed to notice the theme of yielding my will to God in many of the talks, I have thought much about this whole concept of what is the appropriate use of that which is mine. As I have written elsewhere,

God truly is the only Being to whom we can accurately surrender our will. We may attempt to surrender our will to others, but in fact they are not constant enough for us to understand in advance what their will is. God is unchanging from everlasting to everlasting, so we know what he will require of us. The “surrender” does not include losing our volition, but rather aligning our volition with God’s. He will not “take us over,” but he requires our voluntary compliance with his plan. Since we still have to provide the energy and determination to accede to his will, we must give that surrender to One who never varies.

And so this all comes down to an issue of humility. Not the lack of self confidence that we sometimes call “humility” in the world, but the true humility which consists of doing *whatever* God requires of us *whenever* it is required.

There is a greatness and a freedom in this surrender which I can feel when I truly ponder this subject. It is still an elusive concept for me, because the slightest hint of pride causes it to slip from my grasp.

3 See also verse 35

4 Romans 8:17

There have been times when I have aspired to that level of surrender for an hour, or a day, and felt such joy that my heart could scarcely contain it. Too often, though, I somehow think that my day-to-day activities don't involve God, and so even though I may be doing that which I should, I do it for myself rather than God, and lose what I might have received. My pride, my wish to assert dominion over myself and my time, constantly fights against the true desire to become what God and Christ would have me be. In fact, the only hope for me ever achieving the glory that awaits me is in the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

And so we come full circle. I am not mine, I am bought with a price. The price, and the hope, are in Jesus Christ. I have hopes to do great things with my time, but the only way to arrive at what I can actually do is to dedicate that time and effort to doing the Lord's will. When I arrive at that surrender then I will find that I can achieve far more in all areas than I possibly could have without Christ's help.