

The Owner and the Steward

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Fraud is a problem in this world. We encounter it on a daily basis. People pretend to be someone else. In a Brussel's marathon a trainer switched roles with his athlete and ran twelve kilometers for him pretending he was the other person. It was estimated that in 1984 approximately 10,000 American physicians had not finished their studies but had bought papers which attested that they had received doctoral degrees. Fraud! But there is an even greater fraud in which almost all humanity is involved—knowingly or unknowingly.

I. The Real Owner

1. *The Owner*

- 1 Cor 10:26; Ps 50:10-12 - God is the real owner of all things (Hos 2:8; Hag 2:8).
- John 1:11 - Jesus came to His own. The context tells us that He is the real owner, because He is our Creator and Savior (John 1:3, 29).

According to Scripture, it is very clear that God owns everything. This is easy to acknowledge, but it hits us hard, if we look at what this includes: all material possessions, our time, our gifts and talents, our body, and fellow humans.

2. *Advantages and Disadvantages*

Apparent disadvantages that God is the Owner: (1) We are not independent, but are subject to God; (2) we do not enjoy absolute freedom; (3) we are accountable for what we do.

Advantages that God is the Owner: (1) God carries the ultimate responsibility; (2) we do not need to worry, because God helps us in good and bad times; (3) to be dependent on God is good, because God knows what is best for us, cares for us, and does not make mistakes; (4) the freedom that God grants us surpasses the so-called freedom of the adversary. God always gives us freedom of choice; (5) we live a happy life in inner peace, joy, and love.

The disadvantages listed above are even advantages, if looked at from the right perspective. Moreover, the human experience of birth and death affirms that we are not owners. We come into this world with nothing of our own. When we die, we cannot take anything along apart from our character. Therefore, we should use the words "I," "me," "my", and "mine" cautiously.

3. *Examples*

- (1) *The King of Assyria (Isa 10:12-19)*. In his speech the king mentions about five times "I" and three about "my," depending on the translation. He makes the mistake to think he was the owner. According to verse 15 he is only an axe, saw, club, or rod, that is, a tool to be used. However he does not consider himself a tool in the hand of God but makes himself owner. Therefore, God's judgment comes upon him (verses 16-19).
- (2) *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants (Matt 21:33-41)*. Again these people behave as if they were owners, and they mistreat God's servants.
- (3) *David's Prayer (1 Chron 29:11-16)*. David is quite different. He acknowledges that God is the one to whom everything belongs. In his prayer he speaks about God constantly ("yours/your" about nine times and "you" eight times, depending on the translation).

II. The Steward

1. *The Parable in Luke 12:16-21*

The main character of this parable is rich, probably intelligent and well respected, but he has wrong goals for his life (1 Cor 15:32). He practically denies the existence of God, he thinks that he can control the future, but in reality he is extremely poor. His life is meaningless and useless.

The rich man has not learned the lesson that everything belongs to God and that he is called to administer God's property. Speaking about himself constantly (about six times "I" and five times "my," depending on the translation) he reveals that he is an egotist without pity and concern for the poor, and by usurping God's property he proves to be a thief.

2. *Status and Responsibility of a Steward*

To be a steward means to preserve, multiply, and utilize the property of the owner in an adequate way. To some extent a steward is a partner of and coworker with the boss. He carries important responsibilities. This makes his life meaningful.

All humans, whether or not they realize and accept it, are stewards. They are stewards of all that God has entrusted to them: material things, time, body, faculties, fellow humans, environment, and the gospel. Even in the future kingdom of God they will remain stewards (Luke 19:17).

What can a boss expect from his employees (God from us)?

- John 6:38 - Respecting the will of the boss and acting accordingly.
- Matt 6:33 - Making the cause of the boss first priority.
- 1 Cor 4:2 - Faithfulness
- Mark 11:22 - Trust

What can the employee expect from the employer (we from God)? The employee can expect "reward," i.e., blessings in this life such as food, clothing, a place to live, joy, peace, serenity, love, etc., and a wonderful eternal life. And yet salvation is always God's gift and cannot be earned. Our service as stewards is a response to His gracious provisions.

III. Why Fraud?

Why do humans not recognize that they are only stewards and that everything belongs to God and has to be administered according to His will? Some people do not know it. They have not been confronted with this truth directly. Others do not want to recognize it. They prefer to play God on an earthly level. They want to be independent and do not trust God. They believe they would miss out on life, if they returned everything to God. They love sin.

But we can make a decision today. We can ask God for forgiveness for having taken His place by acting as if we were the owners of what we are and what we have. We can return God's property to Him and happily accept Him as our Lord. We can ask Him for His help in administering what in reality belongs to Him.