

The Principle of Ownership

Though it may seem a disjunction to address it this way, we must deal with principle of higher law and the principle of ownership as being two different parameters bearing upon our existence. The reason for this is borne out when it becomes clear that isolating the two parameters allows us to understand more clearly the why of "Against thee, thee only have I sinned..."

Ownership, and the rights pertaining thereto, are virtually absolute. It is only in a society that does not allow personal ownership of property that these rights are not understood. The Scripture puts forth that ownership is near absolute, and the LORD God has regard to that ownership. For our understanding of this, the incident of Ananias and Sapphira is instructive. Please note the wording and the inferences and implications of what is stated by the apostle Peter:

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, **sold a possession, And kept back part of the price**, his wife also being privy *to it*, and brought a certain part, and laid *it* at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, **why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? 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. (Acts 5:1-4)

If we care to note, Peter did not rebuke Ananias over the issue of keeping part of the proceeds of the sale. Rather, what he rebuked him over was lying about how much they chose to give. Ananias and Sapphira chose to cover up what they did to look better in the eyes of their brethren. They chose to make it appear as if they had sold the land and given the entirety of the proceeds to the church. What they apparently did not grasp was that the LORD was not demanding they sell

everything. Rather, if they sold, then they ought to be honest about what they were doing with the proceeds of that sale.

We see this view validated in the language used by Peter when he stated "Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?" In short, Peter is telling Ananias that he did not have to sell the land, and after it was sold, they did not have to give any of the money. Rather, that was the choice of Ananias and Sapphira. Moreover, all they needed to do was declare exactly what they had done. They were the owners of the land, and of the money after the sale and were under no particular obligation to do anything with it.

However, to understand why they did what they did, the following passage from Acts, Chapter 3 is also instructive. It becomes apparent that Ananias and Sapphira did not want to 'look bad' in front of the brethren, and thus chose to do as they did.

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any *of them* that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: **for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.** And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, *and* of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold *it*, and brought the money, and laid *it* at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4:32-37)

Now we know that no one is really concerned about how they look in the eyes of their fellow man, particularly in the eyes of their brethren in the church, right? Not really. How we

perceive we are viewed in the eyes of others is an extremely powerful motivator of our behavior. Thus, to appear to be as others in the church, yet 'hedge their bets' as it were, Ananias and Sapphira schemed to sell land, lie about the price, and present it to the LORD and the LORD's agents in the church as being a complete sacrifice. Thus, it is not and was not, an issue of giving up everything, but of being honest about what is being done. So it is, that even in a situation where it would seem that ownership rights would be given up, they are not, and are furthermore not subject to be relinquished.

Thus, we have two of the three principles which bear on this issue of "Against thee, thee only have I sinned..." bringing us to the subject of agency referenced in the Scripture passages which addressed the principle of higher law.

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