

Walking in Our Father's Footsteps (Part 3)

Ephesians 4:25 – 5:2

July 19, 2009

Tom Pennington, Pastor

Countryside Bible Church

We all understand that our country has been through some challenging and difficult economic times. We've read about, and in many cases, we've experienced it. So, I don't mean by what I'm about to say to diminish that reality at all. But I think it's still true, and we can say that as Americans, we all have difficulty realizing just how rich as a country we really are and how rich we are even as individuals sitting here this morning. We tend to compare ourselves to others who have more than we do and conclude that that means that we're really not that wealthy after all. Robert Heilbroner, an American economist and historian of economic thought, has suggested a little mental exercise to help us as Americans really come to grips with our situation. So, let me have you for a moment imagine the scenario that I describe in your own world about yourself.

First of all, picture your home for a moment and mentally take all of the furniture out of your home except for one table and a couple of chairs and a blanket and some pads that you can use for a bed. Go to your closets and the drawers of your dressers and take out all of your clothing except for the oldest set you own and one pair of shoes. Go to the kitchen and empty your pantry and your refrigerator except for one small bag of flour, some sugar and salt, a few potatoes, some onions and some dried beans. Dismantle all of the bathrooms in your home, shut off the running water, and remove all of the electrical wiring.

Get rid then of the house itself, and move your entire family into something that is about the size of a tool shed. Place your new imaginary house in a barrio. Then cancel all of your subscriptions to newspapers, magazines, book clubs because you can't read anyway. Imagine that there's one radio for the entire barrio. Then move the nearest hospital or clinic ten miles away and replace the doctor there with a midwife. Throw away all your bankbooks, stock certificates, pension plans, insurance policies, and keep for your family a nest egg of about ten dollars. Then give the head of the family a few acres, a few acres on which he can cultivate, raise a few hundred dollars of cash crops each year, of which one third will go to the landlord and one tenth to the money lenders. And then kind of the coup de grace, imagine cutting your life expectancy by twenty-five or more years.

Available online at: www.countrysidebible.org

Copyright © 2009 Tom Pennington. All rights reserved.

Unedited transcript for personal use only.

That, said Heilbroner, is what daily life looks like for more than a billion people who live on our planet today. Because of our amazing affluence, as Americans, I'm afraid that we have a skewed view of all that pertains to money and wealth, a skewed view of what we can do to get it and when we have it, what we can do with it.

But that's not really unusual. The same thing was true with the church in Corinth. Even those Christians in Ephesus. Even those Christians in Ephesus where Paul had taught for two years struggled with these very same issues. And as Paul writes back to them several years later, he sets out to correct their flawed views of a number of things, but he sets out to correct their flawed views about money and wealth and work in Ephesians 4. And he does so in a single verse. In Ephesians 4 to 6, Paul urges us, in those last three chapters of this letter, Paul urges us to walk worthy of our calling. And we're learning that to walk worthy of our calling, we must walk in love. That's really the theme of Ephesians 4:25 all the way down through chapter 5:2. Paul states the theme of this paragraph at the very end of it. Look at chapter 5:1,

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love....

Paul says listen, if you want to walk in a way that's worthy of your new position in Christ, then you must walk in your Father's footsteps and you must live a life that is defined by love even as God loves.

Now as Paul develops this theme of walking in our Father's footsteps here and imitating Him in our love, beginning in verse 25 through the end of the chapter, Paul provides us with five illustrations or examples of how to imitate God by walking in love. We've looked at the first two of Paul's five illustrations. We've seen in verse 25 don't lie; instead, speak the truth. And secondly in verses 26 to 27, the second example or illustration of walking in love like our Father is don't get angry; instead, resolve your conflicts. Don't get angry; instead, resolve your conflicts. And we looked at that in great detail last week.

Today we come to the third illustration of how to walk in love, and it's this. Don't steal; instead, work hard and be generous. Don't steal; instead, work hard and be generous. Look at verse 28, "He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with one who has need." It's an amazing verse, and it appears very simple on its surface, but what lies behind this verse is a huge body of revealed truth that Paul frankly just takes for granted that we know. Undoubtedly, he had taught the people there in the church in Ephesus much of the theological underpinnings of these

concepts while he was there with them so he doesn't need to lay that foundation again, but we do need to lay that foundation because frankly, many of us don't know what the people sitting in the church there in Ephesus knew.

This is so often misunderstood. I don't want to assume that you know what Paul assumed the church in Ephesus knew. So, before we look in detail at verse 28, and Lord willing we'll do that next Sunday morning, this morning I want to give you an overview of a Biblical philosophy of ownership and property, a Biblical philosophy of ownership and property. I've studied it this week and tried to reduce what the Bible teaches about ownership and personal property to six foundational principles, six foundational principles that I want us to look at together this morning.

Let's begin. The first foundational principle of property and ownership is this, God owns everything that exists. God owns everything that exists. You run into this very early in the Scripture. You remember that mysterious character in Genesis 14 named Melchizedek? He comes out to bless Abram, and when he speaks to Abraham [then Abram,] he says this to him, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High [and then he calls God this,] Possessor of heaven and earth." He says the Most High God possesses heaven and earth.

Moses talks to the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 10:14. He's there on the plains just outside of Jordan on the east side of, of Jericho. And they're getting ready to go into the Promised Land and he says this to them: "to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it." Did you hear that last part? To the Lord your God belongs the earth and all that is in it.

In Job 41:11, God is speaking. He's talking to Job. He's setting Job straight, and He says to Job this: "Who has given to Me that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine." Whatever is under the whole heaven belongs to Me, God says.

Turn over to Psalm 24. In Psalm 24, the psalmist couldn't put it really any clearer. David writes in Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it." You couldn't make a more comprehensive statement than that. The earth belongs to God and everything in it belongs to Him as well.

In Psalm 104, David rehearses the wonderful truths of God's care over all His works and notice what he recites. He goes through a whole list of what God has done. He talks about light in verse

2, the clouds in verse 3, the wind in verse 3 and verse 4. He talks about fire. He talks about the earth itself, the waters that cover the earth. Verse 8, the mountains, the valleys. He talks about springs in verse 10. All the animals he begins to talk about in verse 11 including the birds in verse 12. Verse 14, the grass, the vegetation. Verse 16, the trees, the cedars. All the animals in verse 18, so you get the feel. He's listing everything that's in the world. He talks in verse 25 about the sea and everything in the sea.

But notice what he says about all of this in verse 24, "O LORD, how many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all; The earth is full of Your possessions." All of this belongs to God. The grass that grows outside of your house belongs to God. The trees that grow in your backyard are not your trees. Those are God's trees. First Corinthians 3:21 says, "all things belong to You."

Now most of us sitting here this morning would say okay, that's basic. I agree with that. I believe that. I've always believed that. But let me just ask you this question. What if God were to choose to take what you call your own away? What if God took away your financial resources? What if God took your home? What if He took your property? What if He took everything you have of value? How would you respond to that?

Well, all of that happened to Job. You remember his response? Job 1:20 says, "Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground [so he's distraught, he's upset about it, but it adds] and worshiped." And this is what he said in his worship when everything he had was taken from him by God. Verse 21 of Job 1, he said,

"... Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. Through all of this Job did not sin nor did he blame God."

Job really got it. He understood that everything he had belonged to God. And when God chose to take it, he didn't get angry with God. Instead, he said blessed be the God who gave and the God who has now taken away. Listen, everything that exists belongs to God. God owns everything you can see. Look around you, walk out this building, drive home, drive across our world, fly on an airplane across the globe, go in your own yard, your own home, everything you see belongs to God.

There's a second foundational principle. God delegated to man authority over what He made and owns. God delegated to man authority over what God created and owns. Now at this point, we're not yet talking about you as an individual. We're talking about mankind. God gave to the human race these rights and authority. God made everything and by right it belongs to Him, but He chose to delegate the right of authority over everything that exists here on earth to mankind, to us.

You see this from the very beginning. Turn back to Genesis 1. On the sixth day of creation after God made Adam and Eve, verse 28 of Genesis 1 says,

God blessed them; and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be as food for you;" [as well as to the other animals.]

So here God gives man sweeping authority over what He's made. Now after the Flood, He comes back and adds yet more authority. Turn over to Genesis 9. n Genesis 9:1,

... God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, ... fill the earth. The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the field and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given. Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I shall give all to you, as *I gave* the green plant."

Listen, if you want to eat just vegetables, that's your prerogative, but God here makes it very clear that He gave man the authority and right to take the life of animals for his food.

Move on to Psalm 8 because in Psalm 8, the psalmist is rehearsing the glory of God and the amazing position that God has put man in, man's dignity. In Psalm 8, he talks about what God has done and he says, verse 4,

"What is man that You take thought of him ...? (Verse 5), ... You have made him a little lower than God, ... You[']ve] crown[ed] him with glory and majesty! [How?] You made ... [mankind] to rule over the works of Your hands; You

[have] put all things under his feet, All sheep and oxen, ... the beasts of the field[s], the birds of the heavens, ... the fish of the sea, Whatever passes through the paths of the seas.”

God delegated authority over His world that belongs to Him, that He made, to mankind. The earth doesn't belong to itself. The earth doesn't belong to some mythical figure named Mother Nature. It belongs to God and God has chosen to give mankind authority over the world He made and that He rightly owns.

Now there's a third foundational principle of property and ownership that's set forth in Scripture and it's this. God established the principle of private ownership. God established the principle of private ownership. You see, God not only gave mankind as a whole the authority to subdue and rule over the earth, but God then established the principle of private ownership so that each of us would own certain things. There are people in our world, even in our country, who have been influenced by the writings of men like Karl Marx and others. And they think the idea of individuals owning private property is nothing but an expression of human greed. Instead, their view is that we should say that the people (and by that, they mean the state) would own those things, and then they would distribute those things to those who have needs.

Unfortunately, there are even Christians who buy into a kind of Christian socialism or Christian communism. They think that the command Jesus gave the rich young ruler applies universally to all Christians. You remember the command in Mark 10, "... go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, you'll have treasure in heaven; and come and follow Me." They, they think that universally applies to all Christians. The Catholic Church has taught through much of its history that a vow of poverty is one of the highest expressions of what it means to live like Jesus. And today, even in Protestantism in a movement called the Emerging Church or the Emergent Church, there is a renewed call for Christians to give up all of their possessions, all of their private possessions, and live in a kind of communal or monastic lifestyle. And to do so is much more spiritual.

Shane Claiborne is one of the better known in this movement. He was on the cover of *Christianity Today* within the last year or so. He founded a new kind of monastic order called "The Simple Way." He calls himself an evangelical. He's part of this movement. And to set forth his own views, he often wears a t-shirt that says "Jesus was Homeless." What he's really saying and what he says in his writings is look, Jesus renounced possessions and so should we. Of course, he's quoting Matthew 8:20 where Jesus said, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the

air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” Listen, folks. Take that passage in its context. Christ is not commenting on the issue of personal property. In context, He is reminding a potential follower that following Him doesn’t promise material prosperity. Jesus was saying listen, you follow Me, I’m not promising you you’re going to be rich, so don’t get that in your head. That’s what He was telling him. But He wasn’t commenting on the principle of private ownership.

So, the question then is what does the Scripture say about this issue of private ownership of property? Let me just give you a brief overview of this. The first text that really addresses it clearly is back in Genesis 15. You remember in Genesis 12, God came to Abram, said I’m going to bless you. And in Genesis 15, He gets more specific and He tells Abraham in verse 18 of Genesis 15, I am going to give you that land. You are going to own, possess, and your descendants that piece of property.

The next way God affirms the principle of private ownership in the Old Testament comes in an unusual way. It comes in the eighth commandment in Exodus 20, the commandment we’ll look at next week. “You shall not steal.” Now think about that for a moment. How does that commandment underscore the principle of private ownership? Well, it would make no sense to make such a command if God didn’t recognize and hadn’t established the principle of private ownership for all men for all time. The reason it’s wrong to take something from someone else is because in the eyes of God it belongs to that other person.

You see this playing out in Israel’s history as well. In Deuteronomy 6, again Moses, there on the plains of Moab preparing the people to enter the Promised Land, says to them right after the great Shema in Deuteronomy 6, you know “Hear, O Israel! The LORD our God ... is one! ... Love the LORD your God,” notice what he says in Deuteronomy 6:10. Moses says,

“... then it shall come about when the LORD your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you, [this is going to be your private property, and here’s what you’re going to get. God’s going to give you] great and splendid cities which you did not build, [He’s going to give you] ... houses [so now we’re talking private ownership, and houses that are] full of all good things [so even the things in those houses] which you did not fill, [He’s going to give you] ... hewn cisterns which you did not dig [vineyards, so mineral rights),] vineyards and olive trees which you do not plant.”

So now we're talking about property and what grows on that property, God is going to give it to you. There he is endorsing the principle of ownership. In Israel, under the theocracy, there was private ownership, and there was public ownership. When God was king of the nation, there was publicly owned land, the temple complex would become one of those pieces, there were others. And there was private property.

In fact, in Joshua 13 and following, you remember Joshua divides the land among the tribes and gives it to them as their permanent possession. In fact, that land that God parceled out through Joshua was even to remain in each of those tribes and families forever. If financial hardship came, and you were forced to sell the property you owned, there was the year of jubilee. Every fiftieth year, that property came back to that family. Leviticus 25:10 says, "It shall be a jubilee for you, and each of you shall return to his own property, and each of you shall return to his family."

So, understand this. The principle of private ownership of land and possessions is absolutely affirmed in the Old Testament under the theocracy when God was king. It is reaffirmed in the New Testament for true followers of Jesus Christ. Turn with me to Acts 5. What makes this text interesting to me is it comes right after a text that some would try to use to say Christians ought to have kind of communal sharing of goods, no private ownership of goods. Remember the people there in the church in Jerusalem after Pentecost had all things in common, it says.

Well, that's misleading because right after that in Acts 5, a man named Ananias comes, you remember? Ananias, his wife Sapphira, they had a piece of property. They still owned a piece of property. They sold it, and they kept back some of the price for themselves. They were in full consent with this, in collusion. They brought a portion of it, laid it at the apostles' feet, and apparently said this is all of it cause they wanted to look good. But notice what Peter says to them. Verse 4, "While ... [that property] remained *unsold*, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control?" Peter here, in the midst of the discussion about church discipline, this guy's about to drop down dead, affirms the right of private ownership in the early church even after those comments about their having things in common.

In Acts 17:25, Paul says to the philosophers there on Mars Hill, "... [God] gives to all people life and ... [He gives them] breath and [God gives to all people] all things." Whatever you have, God has given to you. It belongs to you.

First Timothy is probably the most definitive passage in the New Testament on this issue. Look at 1 Timothy 6. Paul is writing to Timothy, who's pastoring now the church in Ephesus. So, interestingly enough, this is back in Ephesus. And he says to him in verse 17 of 1 Timothy 6, Instruct those who are rich in this present world to sell everything they have and give it away. Is that what it says? No, it says,

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited ... [not] to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, [because God's the One who's given them those things.] ... [He] supplies all things to enjoy. *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share.

So, it still is their own. They're not commanded to sell it, but they're to use it wisely for the good of God's people and His kingdom as well as to enjoy.

It's interesting. If you fast forward to the millennium, to the thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth, it's even implied there's private ownership there. In two passages in the Old Testament, Micah 4:4 and Zechariah 3:10, in both of those passages, it says that in the millennium, each man will sit under his own vine and fig tree. The implication beyond prosperity is also private ownership.

Wayne Grudem, in his excellent book *Business for the Glory of God*, [if you haven't read, I highly recommend it to you,] he writes, "Ownership of possessions is a fundamental way that we imitate God's sovereignty over the universe by exercising sovereignty over a tiny portion of the universe, that is, the things we own." God created the world, He designed human history, so that there would be private property. He intended that people, that you and I, own various possessions: food, clothing, houses, lands. He even includes tools and animals and equipment necessary for business. So, property and ownership then is not a human capitalistic construct as the socialists and communists argue. It is directed and orchestrated by God Himself, and it's a reflection of His own sovereignty.

So, principle number one, God owns everything that exists.

Number two, God delegated to man authority over what He created.

Number three, God established the principle of private ownership.

A fourth principle that we need to understand is that we are owners, we really are owners, but only in the sense of stewards of what we possess. We are owners, but only in the sense of stewards of what we possess. You see, we are still not the ultimate owners. We are like vassals responsible to a suzerain or a feudal lord. We've been granted ownership, but only under the ultimate owner, the suzerain or the feudal lord. We are responsible to steward our property with the goal of providing benefit to our Lord.

You see this in the Scripture as well. The same God that allowed us to own things reminds us of this from time to time. Listen to what He says in Leviticus 25:23. This is after He said you're going to have land. He says, "The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are *but* aliens and sojourners with Me." You're going to have land. It's going to be your land. You're going to own property, but don't for a moment think that you are the ultimate owner of that land. It is My land. Don't ever forget that.

David, when he talks about the giving, the people gave to build the temple in 1 Chronicles 29:14, he says this. He says we've been able to give generously "For all things come from You [God], and from Your hand we have given [to] You." So, it's mine. I have it. It's my, I own it. It's my property, and I'm giving it to You, God, but I'm only giving it to You because You gave it to me. It's from Your hand that we're giving You these things.

Jesus, in Luke 16:12, refers to money like this. He says, "... If you have not been faithful *in the use of* that which is another's [talking about money, in other words, implied it's God's money], who will give you that which is your own?" Or in another passage, that which is true riches. So, in other words, whatever we have, we do own it, but only in the sense of being stewards of it. And when we die, guess what? We don't take any of it with us. We leave it all here. Ecclesiastes 5:15, "As he had come naked from his mother's womb, so he will return as he came. He will take nothing from the fruit of his labor that he can carry in his hand." First Timothy 6:7, "For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either."

I worked in a mortuary as a seminary student, and it didn't matter how rich or how poor the man was. They looked the same when they had died. They could take nothing that they owned with them. Here's the point. During your life here, God has made you a steward. He has allowed you ownership of what really belongs to Him. Let me ask you a question. If I were to ask you this morning what do you own, what would you say? What belongs to you? What would you list as your assets? Maybe money in a checking account, perhaps a saving account, investments (may not look as good as they did a year ago), retirement, pension, life insurance, perhaps a house or a

condo, a car, other equipment maybe necessary to run your home or your business, furniture, appliances, electronics, computers, food, clothes.

Do you understand that all of those things belong to you only in the sense that you are a vassal to a great suzerain or feudal lord? You're just a steward. How are you doing with your stewardship? Are you using it wisely? Are you using those resources that you own, but are really just given to you for a time, wisely? Are you using them the way the Lord would want you to use them, as He directed? And we'll talk more about that next week.

Consider a fifth foundational principle of ownership. Because of the fall, our thinking and behavior regarding possessions have become badly skewed. Our thinking and behavior concerning property and possessions have become badly distorted, badly skewed. You see, we are not by nature good stewards and owners of what belongs to the Lord. Instead, because we are born sinners, when it comes to possessions and property, we regularly, naturally distort and pervert the divine purpose. This is true of all of us.

Let me ask you a question. How do we regularly sin when it comes to property and possessions? Well I've made a little list. Let me give it to you real quickly. Here are some ways that we distort or skew the divine perspective.

We steal the property of others. We'll talk about that next week, Ephesians 4:28.

Secondly, we hoard our own property and refuse to share it with others. So, we hoard. First John 3:17 says, "... whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?" But we do it.

We abuse what we have and don't take care of it. Did you realize that was a sin? Well, it doesn't belong to you. What are you doing with it? We abuse it and don't take care of it. Proverbs 24 talks about this very thing, particularly in reference to the sluggard. Verse 30 of Proverbs 24 says,

I passed by the field of the sluggard
And by the vineyard of the man lacking
sense, and behold, it was completely overgrown with thistles;
Its surface was covered with nettles,
And its stone wall was broken down. When I saw, I reflected
upon it; I looked, *and* received instruction. [This guy's saying] "A little sleep, a
little slumber, A little folding of the hands [I'll do it tomorrow, mañana]," Then

your poverty will come *as* a robber And your want like an armed man. [We sin against God and what He's given us to own when we abuse it and don't take care of it.]

Number four, we squander and lose it. We squander it and lose it. Proverbs 21:20, "There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise, but a foolish man swallows it up." He just burns through everything he gets. He just squanders it. He buys impulsively things he doesn't need. He has no resources. It's like the guy who's earning millions of dollars a year, and he spends every penny of it, and then when he's out of that job, he's only able to do the lowest of tasks for the least amount of money.

We love and are devoted to our possessions. There's another way we sin with our possessions. We love them and are devoted to them. Jesus talks about this in Matthew 6, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." In other words, there are people who love and are devoted to wealth. It's a sin against God.

We covet what we don't have. There's another sin with possessions. We may not have it so we want it. Why do you think there's the tenth commandment? Exodus 20:17, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house ... or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor." We don't have it, and we want it. The latest model, or excuse me, the last year's model isn't good enough. We want the latest model cell phone, car, kitchen, you fill in the blank.

We use our possessions and our property to stoke our own pride. Daniel 4:30, you remember Nebuchadnezzar? He's walking around Babylon, looking at the city of Babylon, and a magnificent city it was. He said, "Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?" Maybe you don't use those words, but we do this just as clearly today. Our house or our car or our boat or whatever it is becomes the defining point of just how great and just how successful we are. It stokes our pride.

We put our trust and confidence in what we possess. Proverbs 11:28, "He who trusts in his riches will fall." First Timothy 6:17, "Instruct ... [the] rich ... not to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches." But we do. And when the stock market crashes, we're devastated because that's where our hope and trust was. That's where our confidence was. That's what was going to provide for us, not God.

We proudly think that we have accumulated our resources by our own efforts, our own ingenuity and our own ability. I won't take the time to turn there, but in Deuteronomy 8:15 to 18, Moses reminds the children of Israel of that. He says look, you're going to get into the Promised Land, you're going to have all this stuff, and guess what's going to happen? You're going to say, "Look what I did." And he says remember who gave you the power to make wealth. But we don't always.

So those are just a few of the ways our fallen, sinful hearts distort and skew the issue of property and possessions. Don't let that happen. What are the foundational principles of ownership and property?

God owns everything, number one.

Number two, God delegated authority over the earth to man.

Number three, God established the principle of private ownership.

Number four, we are owners only in the sense of stewards of what we possess.

And number five, our thinking about and behavior towards possessions are both badly skewed and distorted.

One final foundation principle in our little survey. We are to take care of our own property and the property of others. We are to take care of our own property and the property of others. Our own property, Proverbs 27 makes this very clear. Proverbs 27:23, "Know well the condition of your flocks, *And* pay attention to your herds; [in an agricultural society, this was the most important thing you owned - take care, pay attention] For riches are not forever, Nor does a crown *endure* to all generations. [And if you'll do this, if you'll recognize the cycles, verse 26],

The lambs *will be* for your clothing, ... the goats *will bring* the price of a field, ... there will be goats' milk enough for your food, For the food of your household, and the sustenance ... [of] your maidens."

Take care of what you own. Use it wisely and carefully and God will use those resources to provide for you and your dependents. Wayne Grudem writes, "When we take care of our

possessions, we imitate God in taking care of the whole universe and He delights to see us imitate Him in this way.”

But did you know you’re also supposed to take care of the property of others? The law makes that very clear. Turn back to Deuteronomy 22. Deuteronomy 22, it’s not enough to take care of your own property. Deuteronomy 22:1 says,

“You shall not see your countryman’s ox or his sheep straying away, and pay no attention to them; you shall certainly bring them back to your countryman. If your countryman is not near you, or if you do not know him, then you shall bring it home to your house, and it shall remain with you until your countryman looks for it; and you shall restore it to him. Thus you shall do with the donkey, thus shall you do the same with his garment, you shall do likewise with anything lost by your countryman, which he has lost and you have found. You are not allowed to neglect *them*. You shall not see your countryman’s donkey or his ox fallen down on the way, and pay no attention to them; you shall certainly (help them) help him to raise *them* up.”

The bottom line is this. You’re not only supposed to care for your own things. You’re supposed to help even care for the things that belong to others whether you borrowed them or not, whether you just come across this person’s belongings. You don’t abuse other people’s things. You help care for them because God has sovereignly distributed property.

Let me summarize the Biblical philosophy of ownership and property like this. Let me just summarize those six principles into one statement. God has distributed material wealth according to His own sovereign purposes, and He demands that we respect and care for the property of others and be wise stewards of our own. That’s what it comes down to. Now with that brief sketch of a Biblical philosophy of property, we’re going to look more specifically at Ephesians 4:28 next week.

That took longer than I had hoped, but as we prepare our hearts for communion, I want you to turn to one more passage, 1 Peter 2. Because here in 1 Peter 2, we’re reminded that just as we own certain things and call them our own, by virtue of the work of Christ, God owns us and calls us His Own. First Peter 2:6, he talks about Christ as the cornerstone. And for us, He’s PRECIOUS. Verse 7 and 8, for others, He’s]

A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE because they're disobedient to the word. Verse 9, "But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION (watch this), A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;" ... [because] you have [now] RECEIVED MERCY, verse 10 says.

Listen, you ever thought about this? You are God's property, twice bought in creation and in redemption. That's what we celebrate in the Lord's Table. Take a moment to prepare your hearts as the men come.

Our Father, we thank You for this reminder from Your Word that nothing we have belongs ultimately to us, but to You. Forgive us for our skewed perspectives. Forgive us for our sin in this area and bring us back even next week to be reminded of our responsibilities with the resources You've given us.

But Father now, as we prepare our heart for the Lord's Table, we come acknowledging our sin not just in this area, but in many others. And we come seeking Your forgiveness. Father, we don't want to take of this reminder of what our Lord did for us, how He dealt with our sin, while still holding onto sin, cherishing it, refusing to repent and turn from it.

And so Father, we come this morning confessing to You our sin, each individually and personally and specifically in our hearts, asking You to forgive us and to cleanse us. Give us a renewed resolve to obey. Lord, let us be clean so that we can take of this reminder of our Lord's sacrifice with clean hands and pure hearts.

We pray that You would do this in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen.