

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

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Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will deal with three key concepts in society that are found in the Bible. First is the institution of marriage. From the very beginning God ordained that a man should leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. Second, is "religion". It literally means to "bind back". Sin separates us from God and also from one another. Religion binds us back to both. Third, is the private ownership of property. On at least 5 different occasions the Bible warns against moving boundary stones that define someone's property (Deut. 19:14; 27:17; Prov. 22:28; 23:10; Job 24:2).

On July 4, 1826, a wealthy unbeliever named Robert Owen denied all three. On the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, he issued his own "Declaration of Mental Independence." From that day forward, Owen boasted, men would be free from what he called a *"trinity of the most monstrous evils that could be combined to inflict mental and physical evil upon the whole race ... I refer to private property, absurd and irrational systems of religion and marriage founded upon individual property."* As we have said, God has ordained all three!

Owen apparently believed that ridding society of private property, religion, and marriage would create a utopia. He assumed without owning nobody could steal, without religion nobody would feel guilt, and without marriage nobody could commit adultery. The question is: "would his theory work?"

Owen passionately believed it would. He came from Scotland but propagated his theories everywhere he could. In Europe, for example, he presented his ideas to the Congress of sovereigns at Aix la Chappelle and had extensive interviews with Prince Metternich of Austria. Mexico even offered him a plot of land in California 150 miles wide to try his radical social experiment. This land included the area where gold was later discovered. Fortunately, the California project never materialized. Therefore, in 1825 Owen went out on his own and purchased 30,000 acres in Indiana from the Rappites. This large area included a city which Owen optimistically called "New Harmony". It was here he assumed his "three principles" would shine like a diamond on black velvet. He was so cocky and confident about the success of his utopia that he predicted that within three years the city of Cincinnati would be depopulated.

However, after only two years his great social experiment was a complete failure. Owen tried several re-organizations, and seven different constitutions, but it still failed. His great gamble not only completely collapsed, but took with it 80% of his fortune.

While marriage and religion are important too, in the remainder of this short letter we will focus only on ownership. The fact that the Ten Commandments forbid "stealing" and "coveting" is proof that the Hebrews owned things. As slaves in Egypt they didn't own land, but in Canaan every Hebrew sat under his own vine and under his own fig tree (Micah 4:4). Property rights were so sacred that even a King named Ahab, could not take the vineyard "owned" by a lowly peasant named Naboth (See I Ki. 21).

Obviously, God is the ultimate owner of everything. **"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it" (Ps. 24:1)**. God owns every animal in the forest and the cattle on a thousand hills (Ps. 50:10). God has, however, given us the privilege of a temporary title. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, for example: **"sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:36)**. Ananias was a wicked man who sold a piece of property and then lied about how much he got

for it. Peter reminded him: **“Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold?” (Acts 5:4).** Yes! Both men “owned” property. Yes! It is also God’s will that we can own property too!

Since our present stay on the earth is temporary, God has provided that what we “own” can be “inherited” by members of our family. Please consider: **“Say to the Israelites, ‘If a man dies and leaves no son, give his inheritance to his daughter. If he has no daughter, give his inheritance to his brothers. If he has no brothers, give his inheritance to his father’s brothers. If his father had no brothers, give his inheritance to the nearest relative in his clan, that he may possess it. This is to have the force of law for the Israelites, as the Lord commanded Moses.’” (Nu. 27:8-11)**

The person who thinks he can keep his earthly possessions is a fool. Jesus once told of such a man who spoke proudly of “my barns”, “my grain”, “my goods”, and “my soul”. God said to him: **“You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself” (Lk. 12:20).** Question - How much did he leave? Answer - He left it all!

The “Good News” is that while we cannot keep our earthly possessions, we can lay up treasure in heaven where moth and rust do not corrupt and thieves cannot break through and steal (Matt. 6:20). In heaven we will experience “ownership” in the truest sense of the word (Lk. 16:12). In heaven “our” property will be “our own” and we will “own” it forever! Therefore the focus of our faith is to seek first the Kingdom of God and not earthly possessions (Matt. 6:33). We are not to labor for food that spoils, but for food that endures forever (Jn. 6:27). Jesus has gone to prepare a “place” for us (Jn. 14:2) and when we get to heaven He will see to it that we “own” our “own place” forever!

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce