

Who Do You Belong To?

1 – Bought With a Price

“**Belong** to?! I don’t **belong** to anyone! I am my own person.”

We value our independence and the thought that we might be **owned** by someone else may possibly make us angry – or depressed. We don’t want our lives to be dictated by other people’s ideas; we don’t want to be pushed around like some insignificant pawn on a vast global chess board. **BUT . . .**

At the same time, we all have a desire, even a need, to fit in, to be part of something, **to be loved**. We join clubs, groups, societies, websites, mailing lists, movements, political parties, supporter clubs, pressure groups, even churches. Maybe we think that we join them entirely because of the values that they represent, the changes that they are campaigning to bring about, causes that are dear to us. All of that is probably true, but would we feel the same if there was no sense of **belonging**?

Belonging brings with it **loyalty**, a sense of wanting to preserve and protect other members of the group to which we belong – “We have to look after each other!” It is only a short step from there to competitive loyalty, one group against another, defending our own group and even attacking ‘opponent’ groups. When we get to that stage, has belonging gone too far?

And then we may commit ourselves to partnerships, business partnerships, team partnerships and perhaps especially life-partnerships – marriage. Commitment, belonging, loyalty, security, love.

“**So, OK, I’m a Christian believer. Who do I belong to?**”

Toughest answer first: If you are a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, a disciple, one who is being taught by him, you are NOT your own person! You are **owned** by Someone Else, who has actually **bought** you, who has paid an enormous price for you, a price you could certainly not afford. *“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought ¹ with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:19,20)* Paul is writing in the context of temptations to sexual immorality, so the words are targeted in that direction, but the general point is clear. More about bodies and sex later!

He underlines it again (this time with the illustration of slavery) in **1 Corinthians 7:23**, and the point is made clearer still: This is an **exclusive ownership** ! If

¹ The word ‘to buy’ is *agorazo*, from *agora*, the Greek market place, where all buying and selling took place, including buying and selling of slaves. One of the words translated ‘redeem’ in the New Testament is *exagorazō* – ‘to buy **out** of the market place’. The other is *lutroō* – ‘to release’, and the commonest word translated ‘redemption’ is *apolutrōsis* – ‘release away’.

one Master has paid the price for you, you can not be the slave of another. But what consolation such ownership brings with it! A promise made to Israel in **Isaiah 43:1** : *“But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob, and he who formed you, O Israel, ‘Do not fear, for I have redeemed¹ you; I have called you by name; you are mine!’ ”* Called by name. Not just bought out of the marketplace as a nameless slave, but selected by the One who has known you from the beginning. Ownership, yes. But personal and loving selection.

There are many references to the **fact** that we have been **bought with a price**, including **Revelation 5:1-10**, which gives us just a little glimpse into the purpose of God in paying that enormous price for us.²

Paul in **Romans 1:1**, calls himself a ‘slave of Christ Jesus’ but that certainly does not mean a hard and slavish relationship! For example, in **Romans 8:38-40** he writes: *“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* Paul is a slave in **response** to that love, and counts his own life as being over, crucified with Christ and yet living in him, by faith in him *“who loved me and gave himself for me.”* (**Galatians 2:20**)

There are two passages in the Old Testament, right in the heart of the Law, which give an illustration of this sort of willing subjection to slavery. They refer to the same scenario, where a Jew actually buys another Jew as a slave, who will serve him for six years before being released. At the end of the six years, the slave can choose to remain in slavery to this family **because he loves them**. He then has his ear pierced as a mark of his ongoing slave service. See **Exodus 21:2-6** and **Deuteronomy 15:12-17**.

At the end of **Romans 11**, Paul writes about the severity, kindness and mercy of God in his dealings with the Jews and with Gentile believers *“. . . so that he may show mercy to all.”* (**v.32**), which leads Paul on to one of his famous ‘therefore’s’: *“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, your spiritual service of worship”* (**Romans 12:1**). See also **Romans 6:12-19** & **Romans 14:7-9**.

“Do I belong to anyone else?”

We talk about family members as ‘ours’: **my** father, **my** mother, **my** brother, **my** sister, **my** son, **my** daughter, and so on. So in a real way they ‘belong’ to us and we ‘belong’ to them, but the Lord Jesus has some difficult words to say

¹ In Old Testament days, one who fell on hard times could be ‘redeemed’ by a close relative, in line with principles set out in the Jewish Law. This is exactly what Boaz did for Ruth (and therefore for Naomi as well) in **Ruth 3 & 4**.

² Some more verses to follow up: **Acts 2:28**, **1 Corinthians 7:23**, **Ephesians 1:7,14**, **Colossians 1:12-14**, **1 Peter 1:17-19**, **2:9**, **2 Peter 2:1**.

into family relationships:— *“If anyone comes to me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”* (**Luke 14:26**. See also **Matthew 10:34-38, Mark 10:29,30, Luke 12:51-53**.) All the scholars agree that ‘hate’ here means ‘hate by comparison to our love for the Lord’, but the message is clear: family loyalties are insignificant when compared to our relationship with our Master. Many personal histories of men and women of God have examples in which that stronger commitment was severely tested. You may have also experienced some of that yourself or seen it play out in others’ lives.

In his own case, there was at least one occasion when Jesus showed that his family relationships were secondary. (See **Matthew 12:46-50, Mark 3:31-35, Luke 8:19-21**) Natural family relationships, normally in relationship with a father (see **Ephesians 3:14,15**), are put in the shade by the relationship of ‘the obedience of faith’ with THE Father. Even when he is just 12 years old and Mary incorrectly refers to Joseph as being his father, the young Jesus pointedly refers to his priority relationship with his true Father and his need to be involved in his affairs (**Luke 2:41-52**).

That didn’t mean, though, that Jesus had a bad relationship with his natural family! At the beginning of his ministry, Mary and Jesus’s brothers stayed with him and his disciples in Capernaum (**John 2:12**). Later, his brothers did not believe in him (**John 7:5**) – possibly with a similar reaction to his radical teaching that caused many disciples to drift away in **John 6:66** – but it seems that they came back, as they and Mary were very much part of the early church in Jerusalem (**Acts 1:14**).

But there is an important ‘family’ relationship which needs careful attention. Our wives and husbands, the life-partners whom our Lord has given to us. Yes, even they must take second place to the Lord Jesus, and it is a happy marriage which starts with that mutual understanding or, if not at the very beginning, then at a later stage establishes his Lordship as the top priority.

But there is more! In **1 Corinthians 7:4**, Paul writes this: *“The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife.”* This continues on from the passage we looked at earlier, where he was writing about our body as a temple of the Holy Spirit in the context of avoiding sexual sin. Now he goes on to write about our sexual relationships within marriage, and this verse certainly goes a long way to dispel the idea that Paul was a misogynist! How many of his modern-day critics would go so far as Paul does and say “I don’t have authority over my body, but my partner does” – especially in terms of sexual relationships ?!

It’s really important to see what Paul means here. He does NOT mean that one partner can say to the other “I own your body, so you must do what I want.” Rather that each of you can say to the other “my body is given over to you, to

please you.” It means **giving, not taking**. And, once again, within the framework of the Lordship of Christ in your individual lives and in your marriage together.

There’s a striking parallel here, between our marriage relationships with each other and our individual relationships with the Lord. In **Romans 6:16 & 19**, Paul writes about being ‘slaves of righteousness’ and in **6:22** about being ‘slaves of God’ and the key, he says, is that we present ourselves to God. This is echoed in that familiar passage in **Romans 12:1-2**, where he urges us to present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice.

Yes, we have been bought with a great price, but our Father does not **force** us into service. He longs for us to respond to his love by willingly presenting and offering our bodies to him as ‘living sacrifices’. If he does not **demand** our slavery, despite having bought us, how can we **demand** compliance from our marriage partner? We can’t. Again, the key is presenting or offering ourselves to each other. And, of course, although the context of **1 Corinthians 7:4** is our sexual relationships within marriage, it’s not only about sex but about our ongoing marriage partnership in all its aspects. **We have given ourselves to each other**,¹ once for all, but the process continues throughout our lives together.

In a similar way, **Romans 12:1-2** is about our need to make a ‘once for all’ commitment in **response** to the fact that we have been ‘bought with a price’, and then speaks of the ongoing process as our lives continue to be transformed – a transformation that proves itself in real daily life! The rest of that chapter is all about practical ways in which our changed lives are visible.

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These are some of the basics, some starting points for our understanding of who we belong to as followers of Jesus, and some of the **practical implications** in our day-to day living. Next time, hopefully we shall explore more about the purposes of God and who our Father has **designed** us to belong to – along with some danger areas!

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¹ In **1 Corinthians 7:32-35**, Paul writes about how the married person is concerned to please their partner and contrasts that with the single person who can concentrate on being concerned ‘about the things of the Lord’. I used to think that he is criticising marriage here and advising against it, but actually all he is doing is stating facts: Husbands and wives are concerned for each other, and that is as it should be; single people don’t have that additional concern and so can concentrate exclusively on pleasing the Lord.