



## THE “I OWN YOU” RELATIONSHIP—REVISITED

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In a previous write-up, this writer expounded on the “I own you” cliché about relationships-how marriage is often mistaken to mean ownership instead of being considered what it is truly meant to be. Marriage is a partnership of souls, of minds. It should never be taken as a license to impose oneself on someone and infringe on that person’s rights. Although a spouse is entitled to the fidelity of his/her partner, it doesn’t give special privileges on the other’s entire life. There are limits, and the only thing that has to have no limits whatsoever is the respect for the partner.

Unmarried couples are entitled to even less, since they are not bound by any law, whether divinely or humanly ordained, to give exclusive rights to their partners on them. Granted, there are those who choose to live as married couples without the benefit of holy matrimony or civil wedding rites. They need not go through the complications of divorce, separation or annulment should they find themselves unwilling to stay married. The advantage is all theirs. However, it is the children born out of such relationships that eventually bear the consequences of relationship failure. But we are digressing here.

Relationships, whether within or outside the bounds of marriage, should not be the ownership type. In a relationship that says *I own you*, the partner seems to be considered a pet, a physical *thing* that one has exclusive rights to.

Instead of one spouse declaring ownership of the other, shouldn’t any typical loving relationship be one that declares *I OWE YOU*? I owe you my love, my respect, my admiration? I owe you my concern, my loyalty, genuine comfort in both good and bad times? And because I owe you so much for loving me as you do, I pledge to honor you with all I am capable of? Isn’t owing someone a lot more within the spirit of unselfish giving, as sincere love should be?

It is common for spouses to want to control their partner. It is natural to want to direct the partner. But marriage is not a movie where one directs while the other follows; it needs to be a movie where both are willing to play their part, and co-direct all the time. There is no such thing as a perfect marriage, I believe. Marriage, after all, is the union of two imperfect beings. It is only upon those imperfect beings to try to work on what make them imperfect and create a harmony between them, somehow.

In conclusion, relationships should allow the partner to thrive within them, find their own niche. A real loving relationship does not hold the other on a leash, but allows the other to walk with you shoulder-to-shoulder as you chart your own courses. And hopefully, your individual courses will eventually lead to the melding of something singular you can both call yours.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Why do marriages often fail?
2. Can you truly own your partner? Why or why not?
3. If you were to write your own marriage vows, what will it say?
4. If your married child told you he/she was intending to divorce, how would you help him/her?
5. Research on the law for conjugal ownership in your own country. Be ready to talk about what you learn in class.