

Luke 15: VV 11 -

"Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me"

In many societies the law of inheritance represents

1. One of the most fruitful sources of dispute between members of the same family. The law of inheritance determines the rights of members of the family to a share in the fortunes or the property of the family. In some societies all the members of the family ~~have~~ ^{are entitled} an equal share ~~to~~ in the property. In others only males have a right to a share. In others only the eldest male child has such a right while the other children only have a right of maintenance from the family property but not a right of ownership.

2. Closely associated with this right is the time when the right becomes vested in the individual who has it. In most societies the right only becomes vested when the head of the family has died. During his life time his successors in title only have the hope of ultimate vesting. They cannot claim the right during the lifetime of the head of the family. To make such a claim ~~is~~ amounts to a death-wish - wishing the death of the head of a family - and is regarded as particularly outrageous - indeed criminal.

3. Christ's use of the law of inheritance to illustrate the love of God indicates ~~his~~ that the kinship bond is the closest analogy to the relationship between God & Man. In view of the great variety of law of inheritance the impression which this parable makes on people varies from society to society. In a society in which children have an equal right of inheritance, the

request of the younger son to be given the goods that fall to him does not sound as outrageous as it would be in a society where the only child entitled to inherit is the eldest son. In Tswana society, for example, the eldest son is the only one who could have made a request like this. No younger son could have made such a request because he would have been told that there is no portion of goods that fall to him. Therefore the Tswana reading this parable is struck not so much by the subsequent prodigality of the younger son but by the fact a father allowed his son to get away with what did not belong to him in any case. Hence this parable is known among them not as the parable of the prodigal son but the parable of the younger son. The merit of the father lay not in his forgiving of a son who had wasted his substance in riotous living, but in forgiving a son who had wasted what did not belong to him in this way.

Moreover in that society nobody ever takes property away from the family establishment. Family property is handed down from generation to generation and belongs to the family as a whole and not to anyone individual. The individual can by his individual efforts add to it but he cannot take it away. Here the younger son not only took claimed & received what he was not entitled to, but he removed it from where it was supposed to be. To the average Tswana it is not surprising that he lost it