

**An 84** year-old CT woman sued her 87 year-old sister who won the half million dollar lottery back in 2005. In 1995, they had notarized the agreement that they share all their gambling winnings equally. They have been buying joint lottery tickets and visiting casinos together ever since.

The younger sister sued, in order to force her elder sister who refused to share the winning. Both sisters had not been on speaking terms for about one year prior to the lottery winning, due to the dispute that involved the grand sum of \$200. Because of that fallout, the younger told her sister over the phone that she did not want to gamble together any more. Based on that conversation, the judge ruled that the elder sister did not have to share the winning.

**Whether it** is 2010 AD, or whether it was 30 AD, siblings still dispute over money and inheritance. Will it ever change? A man approached Jesus, asked him to tell his brother to divide the family inheritance with him.

Jesus flatly refused to be involved in such a dispute. Why wouldn't Jesus care about the dispute that involves the family inheritance? It is definitely not fair for one brother to take all the inheritance and leave nothing for his brother. If Jesus would not be the arbitrator, then, the only recourse is: litigation.

Does this mean that God does not get involved in the disputes that involve money and inheritance? Is such a dispute completely outside the attention of God? Do you mean that the financial disputes have nothing to do with the justice and the righteousness of the kingdom of God? God would not care, if some one rips off another? God would not care, if a company exploits its workers?

**Of course,** God would. The God of justice looks after those who are oppressed by those who have power. That is why God is just and righteous. In the Bible, the exploitation of the workers is clearly sinful, and the labor dispute that arises from such

exploitation is the subject of God's intense scrutiny:

**James 5:4** - Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.

What drove Jesus away from such a dispute, regarding the inheritance, is the dispute's spiritual quality, or lack thereof—namely, greed. We do not have all the information, but Jesus must have seen through the situation, and determined that the dispute was caused not by the injustice that one brother meted out against the other, but by the greed according to which both brothers mutually operated.

*Jesus penetrated* through the fog of greed, and got to the source of the dispute: the desire to accumulate abundance of possessions. Jesus refused to endorse one person's greed over the other's.

That desire is the source of the greed. It is this desire to

accumulate possessions that drives one to act greedily. As long as one harbors this desire, or as long as one believes that life consists in the abundance of possessions, one is enslaved to this greed.

*How easy* it is to sever one's relationship with another sibling, when money becomes the focus of the relationship! Once we define our relationship by the things that we can see and touch and move—such as money and property—our relationship with one another becomes subject to the things we see and touch and move. Would you define your relationship with your significant other based on the tangible things that you can see, touch, or move? Or would you rather build a relationship with your significant other that is impervious to things you can see, touch, or move?

If a man married a woman for her looks, what would happen, after she had given birth to his children, and her looks please him no more? If a woman married a man for his wealth,

what would happen, when the man's charm wore out? We know what happens: the man looks for a younger woman, and the woman wants the divorce settlement. Can we expect Jesus to get involved in situations such as these, and to divide the assets on their behalf?

**Jesus told** a parable of a rich man who reaped a record harvest. He harvested so much surplus grain, that his warehouses could not contain it all. So he decided to pull down his barns and build them bigger, to store the grain and all his stuff.

Now most of us would wonder: "What is wrong with building them bigger?" Isn't it the way people think and behave, when they become affluent? Isn't it the way the society operates? Isn't it the way things have been, and will be?

Yes, yes, and yes. That is the way the society is, and that is the way our culture is, as far as our management of the material wealth is concerned. Since we

are born and raised in such a culture, such an outlook on the management of the material wealth is the norm, and we naturally adapt to such a standard.

**This outlook** has taken hold in our psyche so deeply that hardly any religious training or academic excellence can wean one off the outlook. As a matter of fact, most of the religious training and academic excellence have been made to be mere tools to facilitate one's achievement of such wealth. People become religious, so that God would reward them; people pursue higher education, so that they could become experts in accumulating the abundance of possessions. The abundance of possessions has become the ultimate goal of all religious and academic endeavors.

What happens, when one's house burns down, business fails, and investment devaluates? What is left in a relationship, when the material wealth shrivels? I hope we can honestly say that we still have something that is far more

worthy and far more lasting than our possessions.

*My father*-in-law used to tell his children: "I have everything but money." He never had the chance to make money for himself. But he had everything—except money. His life was not defined by the material possession, but by the loving relationship he had built with his wife and children. That relationship is still alive in each heart, long after he left this world.

One may be skilled or lucky enough to gather the abundance of possessions, but when it is time for his children and relatives to divide the inheritance, the very wealth for which one spent the lifetime to accumulate often turn into the potent poison that kills the relationship among the family members.

*Does God* really say, "You fool," to the one who pulls one's barns down, in order to build them bigger? Why is upgrading one's storage facility to suit one's

income level a foolish enterprise to God?

What God sees is this: one's abundance of possessions for which one devoted one's life and energy will be divided by the strangers who are equally greedy, be it his own family or relatives, with whom the deceased likely had no lasting relationships. The deceased had stronger relationships with his own possessions than with his own family, or with God.

Here we can think of an alternative scenario: the rich man could have released part, or all, of his surplus harvest for the afflicted and the destitute in his area. Think of the resources he could have saved by not tearing down the existing barns and building the new. Imagine the new relationships and new lives he could have created with those to whom he reached out. Envision God's blessings he could have channeled through his own hands. Now that is being rich toward God.