

Paying for Help, when it is Wrong to do so! (a Christian view of **Bribery**)

I came across opportunities for bribery several times when I lived in Khartoum North—when my family needed residence visas to live as guests in the country; when I needed my library of Christian books cleared to enter Sudan through airport customs; or when we disputed a water bill for our home after the pipes were cut and an electric pump was stolen.

In every case, if I had given money to one of the officials my needs would have been quickly met. Employers paid these men and women to do their jobs, but the people wanted something extra from me before they would help me.

I never gave anyone anything because bribery is against the laws of Sudan (bribery and extortion). It is therefore against the teaching of God in the Bible, see Romans 13:1-7.

I could make up excuses to myself: *I needed to settle to my work as a pastor and not give time to the residency process. The good Christian study books would be useful to so many other people as well as to me. Everyone has a basic need to have some water for cooking, washing, etc. We were no exceptions.* Following these excuses I could break the law.

But, my Christian conscience tells me that bribery is always wrong, so I never do it.

1. **Bribery is a crime** when a gift given changes a person's behaviour while they are doing their duty.

A bribe makes things easy for the person who sins by giving it, see Proverbs 17:8; 18:16; 21:14. But making things easy does not make it right. God holds each person accountable for what they have done, see Proverbs 3:9-10; 9:10; 10:9; 10:16; 22:2-4; Isaiah 1:23-26; 5:25.

Does it honour, worship and respect God to give (or to receive) a bribe?

Is bribery a good use of money in God's eyes? He sees even what is invisible to other people.

2. Bribery supports selfishness and greed in the receiver

- Accepting a bribe indicates selfishness—not caring about your employer, your client or the poor (who cannot pay). All that concerns you is what you want, Proverbs 28:20-21.
- It also shows greed—extra money means more to you than a clear conscience. Bribery is the result of greed, Proverbs 15:27.
- When bribery is used it cultivates the roots of much evil in people and in society, 1 Timothy 6:9-10.

God's people, especially the leaders, must always avoid "dishonest gain", Exodus 18:21.

The giver and receiver of a bribe are both guilty.

3. Bribery shows selfishness and impatience in the giver

Bribery is often given to speed things up. It is convenient to forget that when I am brought to the top of the list, plenty of other people are pushed lower down it. Do I ever think what is the effect of my actions on other people waiting in line? Am I only selfish in my concern? A bribe may simply be a gift given with the wrong motive.

Genesis 1:26,27 teaches me to see and consider God's image in every other human being.

In Mark 12:30-31 Jesus says we express our love for God by loving other people.

When tempted to use bribery and make things quicker, I must remember one visible sign of God the Holy Spirit living in a Christian's life is patience and another is self-control, Galatians 5:22-23.

Who or what do I trust as I do my work? Do I show my trust in money or do I show my trust in Jesus? Do not trust in your riches to buy your way through, trust God and live in righteousness, Proverbs 11:28.

4. Bribery corrupts systems of judgement

The more it is allowed to go on the more corrupt the system becomes. The motive for giving *any* gift must be examined, see Exodus 23:8.

- If a gift is given *secretly* to "buy" a contract for your business, or to secure an appointment with a migration or resettlement official, to get your house connected up to the electricity,

then it is wrong. Of course you may have to pay a fee. The fee will be public, in the company accounts and liable for government tax. Bribery will try to hide away, Proverbs 17:23; Ecclesiastes 7:7; Matthew 17:24-26. .

- In this way bribery denies justice to the poor. They cannot pay anything extra for what should be theirs anyway. While other people pay bribes to get what they want, the poor become disadvantaged, Deuteronomy 15:11.
- Bribery promotes discrimination, favouritism, tribalism, and bias in any system. Christians should be the ones who stand up for the poor and break the corrupt cycle, Deuteronomy 16:18-20

5. Bribery is commonplace

They hold the power! People use their position to withhold something until you pay them something extra than the salary from their employer. This is acceptable in some parts of Sudanese (and other) culture, but acceptance does not make it right! For example, slavery was acceptable in my (English) culture in centuries past. But slavery was, and is, wrong!

Christians can offer respect to other people, but still choose to live differently. We are Christ's representatives! In time, people will respect us for our honest and upright lifestyle.

Daniel is an example of someone who God honoured in circumstances that appeared to be against him, Daniel 1:3-20. He and his three friends were ready to be different and ready to be tested, verses 12-13. God worked on their behalf, verses 9 and 17.

We walk in two worlds: the lifestyle of the Republic of Sudan and the lifestyle of the Kingdom of God. When cultural acceptance clashes with biblical right and wrong true Christians will consistently choose to follow the rules and patterns of Christ's Kingdom.

Discuss:

Suppose you were in prison, facing probable execution. Suppose the one in authority over you let it be known to you and to your friends that a “consideration, a sweetener, a commission, a fee, a bribe” would lead to your release.

As a Christian what should you do?

(After your discussion see what Paul and the early Christian church did in Acts 24:26-27).

6. Bribery tries to avoid the cross Christians should carry

The idea that bribery is “necessary” is relative to the price you are prepared to pay to operate without it. The hard way is usually God’s way. The Christian asks: Not “what works?”, but “what is right?” A Christian who chooses to follow the world’s ways loses his or her Christian influence, Luke 14:25-35.

7. Bribery compromises Christian witness

How can you explain the gospel to someone you regularly bribe? They don’t see your God as able! Using bribery teaches the people you bribe that your God is *not* able!

Remember the three friends of Daniel? They would not compromise their Christian consciences by bowing down to the pressure their community put upon them. They stood firm for what they believed in. They were determined to do so even if it meant being burnt to death, Daniel 3:13-18.

Verses 26 and 28 show that the country’s leaders eventually understood their godly witness.

When people SEE our values, they will judge our JESUS by our choices in life.

8. Bribery’s consequences include

poor quality work,

inappropriate awards or contracts,

delay for other people,

victimisation and oppression of the poor who cannot pay.

From a purely human perspective these things are disasters:

People are killed on the roads because drivers buy their driving licences rather than passing a test to prove their ability.

Children are poisoned by eating food certified as safe by an officer who took a bribe rather than properly test the production processes.

Buildings collapse because the builders' "bought" certificates rather than building correctly (and probably more expensively).

9. A climate of bribery is catastrophic for trust

Bribing is manipulating the system. Some business practice shows we are fallen (sinful) people living in a fallen (sinful) world. Bribery is a quick payment—a small contribution made.

But the highest of prices is paid in personal corruption, in business corruption, in state corruption and in social corruption.

Leviticus 19:35-36 standards disappear

Proverbs 11:1 hidden trickery is expected

Proverbs 29:27 mistrust produces hatred

Matthew 5:37 words cannot be trusted

James 3:6 corruption spreads from words into everything

A Christian must be different from the world around him:

Proverbs 4:20-27.

10. Bribery is usually covered up

Secrecy versus publicity is a good test! If secrecy is necessary, a gift, a tip, or a donation is a bribe! Can I defend my action—publicly—without dishonouring the name of Jesus? If secrecy is necessary, what you are doing is wrong!

Achan buried his goods stolen during the battle of Jericho, Joshua 7:1, 20-21. But there are no secrets from God. God brought catastrophe to Achan's nation, and to Achan's family and eventually to Achan himself, Joshua 7:25-26.

Humankind is always trying to hide from God, Genesis 3:8-9, but it has never worked and it never will.

“He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy”, Proverbs 28:13.

A Christian plan of action:

1. **Decide to honour God, always**, John 12:25-26. Resolve to be like Samuel. Towards the end of his life, as he was handing over leadership to his successor, nobody in the entire country could charge him with doing wrong, 1 Samuel 12:2-5.
2. **Live in the sight of God.** The Bible’s Kings and Chronicles tell stories of people who “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord”, and were blessed while they did. They also record others who “did evil in the eyes of the Lord” and brought judgement upon themselves and their nation.
3. **Accept the human consequences**, Matthew 5:11-12. Protesting for purity in the transactions of life may bring prejudice and persecution. Pay this price, because it is the *right* price. You may say something like this: “I know the system, but I want to work the legal way”.
4. **Live in righteousness, while trusting in God**, Matthew 6:31-34.

Discuss:

In Matthew 28:11-15 chief priests bribe Roman guards to tell a false story about Jesus’ body and His resurrection. They paid money to try and corrupt the truth.

If you were offered a bribe (for any reason),

1. what would you do?
2. why would you do it?
3. how would you work out the consequences?

A bribe aims to influence a person who is only doing their duty.

Think prayerfully ... Are the following 5 statements True or False?

1. It is right when someone has baked bread I can buy it from them at an agreed price, which covers their costs and gives them a reasonable profit.
2. It is wrong when someone is already being paid to process my “new building permission” that I pay them something extra before that permission is granted.
3. It is right that I am charged an entrance fee to study at school or college, but it is wrong if I offer extra cash to a staff member, so that I (or my child) can graduate near the top of the class.
4. It is wrong to appoint my friend to a job when he is not the best qualified person who has applied, but I remember he has given me something in the past.
5. It is neither right or wrong to give Christmas or Eide gifts to someone I know I will have to ask for business help later in the year.

Why are these statements True? Or, why are they False?

Extra Discussion guide (some discussion is already set within the chapter above)

Using this chapter and Scriptures quoted:

1. “My Christian conscience tells me that bribery is always wrong, so I never do it”.

Do you agree or disagree?

Why? Try to be biblical in your reasoning either way.

2. In the following Proverbs parts appear to suggest bribery is a good thing:

Proverbs 17:8; Proverbs 18:16; Proverbs 21:14.

Why are these verses in our Bibles given it is *not* to support bribery?

Consider also Ecclesiastes 7:7 and Ezekiel 22:12.

3. Explain how bribery encourages “the love of money” which is itself “a root of all kinds of evil”,

1 Timothy 6:6-11. What evils come from bribery?

4. Why is doing “what is right before God” more important than “what works here in Sudan”?

5. The writer of Proverbs 4:23 says we must “guard our hearts”. Explain how Daniel and his friends did this, and explain the effect such a strong decision had on their entire lives. The account is in Daniel chapters 1-6.