

## Bribery

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“[...] **he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe**, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him. (Acts 24:26, NLT-SE, emphasis added)

The dictionary defines ‘to bribe’ as *persuading someone to act in one’s favor, typically illegally or dishonestly, by a gift of money or other incentive*. In reality, however, bribery takes place equally for both legal (!) and illegal activities and in both directions, i.e. either initiated by the one who offers the bribe or the one who demands it.

Here in Acts we read that Paul was unjustly imprisoned, yet Felix, the governor, kept him in jail hoping to receive a bribe for granting him his legal right to be released! That’s a perverse request and we should learn from Paul’s example not to yield to it, even if it meant imprisonment for another couple of years in his case! Would we be prepared to walk that road for righteousness and justice sake? Sadly, still too many Christians don’t see it that way, in fact, they regard this kind of attitude plain stupid or disadvantageous at best.

When we were living in Africa, Christians argued with me that e.g. bribing immigration officials to get a work permit is justified because this way they could serve and proclaim God in this country. Is it possible to serve a righteous God through deliberate unrighteous acts?

In Europe e.g. I have been confronted with Christian business people justifying the bribing acts of their corporation with guaranteeing work for their employees. As noble as that sounds, but what about the employees of other companies who lose out because of this?

These are just a couple of examples from my vast personal international exposure to bribery in corporate contexts, in aid organizations, government offices, post offices, telecommunication companies, municipalities, juvenile and high courts, law firms, NGOs, hospitals, the police force, jails, even missions and churches. Bribery permeates all levels of society and all domains, all over the world, individually, corporately and nationally. Just based on its secular definition, at least \$0.5 to \$1.0 trillion are diverted annually on a world wide basis from the real economy for mere palm greasing, all to the detriment of ordinary citizens.

While in developing nations bribery might be more in the open but is considered no crime unless you’re caught, the sophisticated laws and regulations of the western world allow you to do a lot of things legally that would qualify for bribery in biblical terms.

So where’s the boundary, the guideline for what is deemed a bribe and what not? The secular world might have its relatively precise definition on paper against which they measure. But from a biblical viewpoint bribery takes place in our heart and is thus often only visible to God. How far do we go in bending and twisting God’s principles of justice and righteousness to make things happen? The danger lies in defending the means to an end. In other words, if bribery allows me to do something apparently beneficial for the Kingdom, it’s permissible and justified. If not paying a kickback would close the door of Kingdom opportunities it’s plain stupid not to bribe. Well, judge for yourself:

“You must never twist justice or show partiality. Never accept a bribe, for bribes blind the eyes of the wise and corrupt the decisions of the godly.” (Deuteronomy 16:19, NLT-SE)

“Whoever is greedy for unjust gain brings trouble to his family, but whoever hates bribes will live.” (Proverbs 15:27, God’s Word Translation)

“A just king gives stability to his nation, but one who demands bribes destroys it.” (Proverbs 29:4, NLT-SE)

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“[...] a bribe corrupts the heart.” (Ecclesiastes 7:7, NIV)