

BRIBERY

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Case Study

Building a Church and Corrupt Officials – Ukraine

A new church building is being constructed in the region of Odessa, Ukraine. To finish the construction, people from the church have to go to several officials to get their signatures on various papers. Many officials, however, abuse their position by insisting that they be paid for their signature, which they are supposed to give as a matter of the role they fulfil. They usually say that something is wrong with the papers or with the building, even though this is not the case, and unless the church remodels the building, they will not sign the required documents. Were the church to redesign the plans, such officials would still find a reason not to sign. Finally people from the church decide to pay money to those officials in order to have all the documents completed. The officials themselves prepare all the necessary documents and sign them.

Bending the Rules with a Bribe for Humanitarian Aid – Ukraine

A church in Ukraine received humanitarian aid (food) from the United States. The accompanying documents stated that the aid was “second-hand” or “used.” This was not true, and the customs officer discovered the discrepancy upon opening the container. According to the law, the official was supposed to seal the container and send the documents to other government offices, with the likely result



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being either that the church would have to pay a high sum for the aid, or that the documents would be rewritten back in the United States. Either option would probably take several months, by which time the date for use of the food would have expired. Given the pressing needs of the people for whom the aid was sent, the church paid the customs officer a “bribe,” he signed the papers, and the church got their container.

INTRODUCTION

“In interviews with Christians from all parts of the world we find that many people in the world believe the most commonly cited moral problem working in ‘Third World’ countries, is corruption or bribery.”¹

There is not much literature written in the West about the problem of bribery, the subject of this paper. May Christians pay bribes? First we will define bribery, examining different definitions. The paper will be built partially on Richard Hays’ methodology.² We will consider the descriptive, synthetic, hermeneutical, and pragmatic tasks of the NT ethic. In the descriptive task we will consider all relevant passages from Scripture on this topic and different approaches to them. We will try to determine, based on Scripture, if it is wrong to bribe or not. In the synthetic task we will consider why three focal images cannot be applied to the bribery question. In the hermeneutical task we will see possible solutions to the bribery question based on different ethical theories. We will see possible uses of each theory applied to the bribery question, and look at positive and negative aspects of each theory concerning bribery. Finally, we will consider the churches’ decision as we consider the case study and do an application.

Definition: To determine what we mean by “bribery,” let us compare different definitions. Noonan says:

By bribery is understood the act or practice of receiving or giving a bribe. A bribe is an inducement improperly influencing the performance of a public function meant to be gratuitously exercised. What counts as “an inducement,” what counts as “improperly influencing,” what counts as “a public function,” what functions are “meant to be gratuitously exercised” have changed as culture has changed. The word “bribery” has strong moral connota-

¹ Bernard T. Adeney, *Strange Virtues: Ethics in a Multicultural World*, (U.K.: Apollos, 1995) 142; Stephen Falkner, “Bribery. Where Are the Lines?” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 35, No. 1 (Jan. 1999): 22-29 For a better understanding of the situation, see Gregory Nichols, “A Case for Bribery: Giving Versus Taking,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 35, No. 1 (Jan. 1999): 30-37.

² Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996).

tions. Our tradition, culture, and our experience determine how we describe this activity.³

Another definition is offered by Harrison: “The bestowing of money or favour upon a person who is in a position of trust (for example, a judge or government official) in order to pervert his judgment or corrupt his conduct.”⁴ Hanke says: “Anything given to a person to induce him to do something illegal or wrong, or against his wishes.”⁵

Falkiner gives a very good comment on bribery; he says that we should not confuse bribery and extortion.⁶ We will see in this paper that giving money to an official to get certain benefits is not always bribery.

Biblical background (descriptive task): Following Hays’ methodology, let us consider passages that discuss bribes. Hays calls this the descriptive task of Christian ethics.⁷ The term “bribe,” *shohadh*, occurs more than 25 times in the Bible, all in the OT. However, both OT and NT contain a number of accounts regarding the practice of bribery.⁸ The first time God mentioned *shohadh*, “an offering,” in a corrupt sense, was in Ex 23:1-3.6-8, after Moses received the Ten Commandments. This word can also mean “an offering, a gift” in a good sense. Therefore, not the word, but the context is important in each case. The Hebraic law condemns everything that would tend to impair the impartial administration of justice, particularly the giving and receiving of gifts or bribes, in order to pervert judgment (Job 15:34; 1Sa 8:3; Ps 26:10; Isa 1:23; 33:15; Eze 22:12).⁹

1. You are not to take a gift or money offered as a bribe (Dt 16:19; 2Ch 19:7; Isa 33:15). He that hates bribes is blessed (Pr 15:27).

2. Bribery is condemned as being wicked and perverting justice and judgment (Dt 27:25; 1Sa 8:3; Job 15:34; Pss 15:5; 26:9-10; Pr 17:23; 29:4; Ecc 7:7; Isa 1:23; 5:23; Eze 13:19; Am 5:12; Mic 3:10-11; Mt 28:12).

The Bible contains numerous examples of those who were not free from bribery. The sons of Samuel the prophet and judge, unlike their father, accepted bribes and perverted judgment (1Sa 8:3; 12:3). David speaks of those whose right hand, which should have been supporting the cause of right, was full of bribery (Ps 26:10). Kings Asa

³ John T. Noonan, “Bribery,” in *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 85.

⁴ R.K. Harrison, ed., “Bribery” in *Encyclopedia of Biblical and Christian Ethics* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987), 44.

⁵ H.A. Hanke, “Bribery” in *Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 653.

⁶ Falkiner, “Bribery,” 24.

⁷ Hays, *Vision*, 3-4.

⁸ Marvin R. Wilson, “Prophets and Green Palms,” *Christianity Today*, Vol. 18, no. 8 (Jan. 18, 1974): 13-15.

⁹ L. Kaiser, “Bribery,” in *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, v.2, CD “The Master Christian Library.”

and Ahaz bribed the king of Syria and the king of Assyria, respectively, for military aid (1Ki 15:18-19; 2Ki 16:8). The leaders of unfaithful Jerusalem proved to be lovers of bribes (Isa 1:23; 5:23; Mic 3:11).

There is agreement within the OT that bribery is reprehensible, says Scherer.¹⁰ Pr 15:27; 17:23 openly condemn bribery. But Pr 17:8; 18:16; 21:14 presents a different attitude. Without giving any moral comment, these sentences describe the positive effects of a bribe. They express pragmatic insight, derived from practical wisdom: if required by circumstance, it is wise to offer a bribe. However, none of these three verses implies doing harm to others. It is reasonable to believe that the sayings in Proverbs do not consider all “bribes” equal. There is an apparent difference between a corrupting gift that is employed to gain an unjust advantage and a bribe that promotes one’s own success, without any evil design.

Pr 17:8 puts bribery in a positive light that promises success. A gift is tempting; it is difficult to refuse; it can prevail over all men. Verse 8 describes the way things are, rather than the way they ought to be. People give gifts to motivate others to help them succeed in whatever they do. It becomes a bribe when you expect something illegal be done for you.¹¹ Lange says that the “gift” here is not to be taken as a bribe, but as a lawful present.¹² The verses surrounding 17:8 reflect the ambiguity of the subject of bribery. Verse 7 speaks of the inappropriateness of “lying lips” and implies an exhortation to honesty. In this context, the promised bribe in v. 8 cannot go along with real wicked intention. On the other hand, v. 9 seems to warn the reader against a fanatical sense of justice. A gift given at the right time may help to resolve problems smoothly.

The second passage is Pr 18:16: “Bribes” lead one into the presence of the great. In this passage *shohadh* is not used. Instead, a more generic term meaning “gift” has been used. We can compare the description of the gift in this passage with the definition of bribery. Here the gift opens a way for the giver that his merits have failed to open on their own; thus, he has bought an opportunity not rightfully his. The act, therefore, is unjust and can be thought of as a bribe. It can also be merely a description of the positive effect of a gift (without acting unjustly) to gain

¹⁰ Andreas Scherer, “Is the Selfish Man Wise?: Consideration of Context in Proverbs 10:1-22:16 with Special Regards to Surety, Bribery and Friendship,” *JSOT* 76 (1997): 59-70.

¹¹ Robert L. Alden, *Proverbs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 133-134.

¹² John P. Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1960), 161.

somebody's favour or to gain friends in a high position.¹³ A good example may be Ge 24:30-33; 33:1-11. Often a gift was presented as a tribute of respect (1Sa 9:7; Mt 2:11). It was an oriental custom to offer suitable gifts to people in authority when a favour or audience was desired.¹⁴

The third problematic verse is Pr 21:14. This passage also appears to present bribery in a positive light: It can smooth anger. Is the one giving the bribe perverting justice? "If the wrath he avoids is a consequence of a crime, then justice has been compromised. However, if the wrath is undeserved, then pacifying it has not perverted justice. This verse does not condemn or condone; it merely observes the effectiveness of the practice."¹⁵

The positive references to bribery in the Bible appear to reflect a utilitarian approach to ethics for those who have no other means of receiving justice. Proverbs condemns those who accept bribes to do wrong (17:23). It also warns that giving gifts does not always work (22:16). A single perspective on bribery cannot be forced on the Bible because different verses were written at different times for different situations and different people. The great majority of OT references to bribery are negative. But there is enough ambiguity to allow for hesitancy in making the prohibition of bribes absolute.¹⁶

Based on Isa 33:15-16, Noonan says: "Like the avoidance of usury, the avoidance of offering has become the requirement of righteousness."¹⁷ But in reality there is no evidence that this passage talks against offering bribes. It may speak only against taking bribes, as we can see according to the form of the verb *naar*, which means "to shake off." If this word is applied to a person who gives bribes, it means "one who shakes off his hands from bribes," meaning that the righteous person should give the bribe sooner, so that it does not remain in his hands.

Eze 22:12 says that one of the reasons for the destruction of Jerusalem was the problem of bribery. It was a violation of God's law given to Moses. Now these *shohadh*-takers have led the nation into captivity.

The OT commanded "not to pervert justice," "not to show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great." The Bible condemns greed, which is a primary motive in bribery. Because of the condemnation of bribery, those who participate in it are also condemned (Job 15:34; Ps 26:10).

¹³ The passage does not give a negative context for this verse.

¹⁴ H.D.M. Spence, ed. *The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 351.

¹⁵ Falkiner, "Bribery," 25-26.

¹⁶ Adeney, *Virtues*, 153.

¹⁷ John T. Noonan, *Bribes* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 18.

Writers of the Bible, talking against bribery, draw a parallel with God. God is just, and does not take *shohadh* when He judges (Dt 10:16-18). God judges people equally (Gal 2:6). What is said of God as a judge is expected from men as judges (Lev 19:1; 2Ch 19:6-7). But this message is ambiguous. From the whole ancient world we know that the gods love gifts, and that the God of Israel also received gifts. We can answer this problem by saying that God did not take an offering as a judge, but as the Lord.¹⁸

¹⁸ Ibid., 30.

In the NT, bribery is mentioned several times indirectly. The idea of it is more implicit, although the motivation attached to it is condemned (Mt 28:12; 1Ti 5:21).¹⁹ In Ac 24:26, bribery is mentioned, but the writer, or Paul, who was asked to pay the bribe, does not give any comments concerning what would be right to do. We know that Paul refused to pay the bribe but we can only guess why. Mt 28:12 talks about real bribe-takers. It is part of the narrative and not a teaching passage, but the negative effect of bribery is obvious. The soldiers had to lie after they were paid off. Noonan mentions Judas, who was paid by the priests to betray Jesus, as a bribetaker.²⁰ It is possible to interpret Judas' action as bribery, but it seems to me that it should be distinguished from bribe-taking. It was betrayal to get money, not a case of bribery. In civil law there is a difference between bribery and betrayal. Otherwise, one could also describe the situation of a paid killer as bribery. In the same way, one could say that Delilah was bribed to betray Samson (Jdg 16:5). In reality, she was paid to get information and betrayed Samson into the hands of his enemies. The NT does not give any moral comments on bribery, but in all the cases where bribery is mentioned in the NT, it is always in a negative context.

¹⁹ Falkiner, "Bribery," 26.

²⁰ Noonan, "Bribes," 58-59.

These are all the passages that I believe talk about bribery. But because of the ambiguity of the meaning of *shohadh* in the OT, some people believe that bribery is discussed in other passages, eg. 1Sa 12:3; Job 6:22-23.

Bribery is a crime that, because of its secret nature, is likely to go undetected unless there is incentive to complain about it and a procedure for its discovery. There is no procedure set out in the Bible for detecting a bribe.²¹ Noonan says that if a contribution is given to a person openly and publicly, it is merely a gift, but if it is given

²¹ Ibid., 24.

secretly, the moral distinction between a gift and a bribe is tenuous.²²

In reality we do not see God's people in the Bible giving or accepting a bribe. The Bible always condemns the practice. Those in authority who decide peoples' future are to be the embodiment of impartial justice. While the Bible never condemns giving a bribe,²³ logically we can conclude that giving a bribe is as bad as taking one. When we give a bribe, we push another person to commit a sin by receiving it.

Synthetic task: Let us move to the three focal images that Hays offers. He believes that we can find key images that all the canonical texts share. These keys are *community*, *cross*, and *new creation*. Hays' criteria are as follows: The proposed focal image must have a textual basis in all the canonical texts; it should not stand in tension with the ethical teaching or major emphases of any NT texts; it should highlight central and substantial ethical concerns of the text in which it appears. These images serve as *lenses* to focus our reading of the NT, so that our blurry multiple impressions of the text come more sharply into focus. The image summarises the story from Scripture and governs the interpretation of individual texts.²⁴

I find these lenses unhelpful because they do not allow us to use what the Bible says about bribery and corruption. The images help us to understand NT texts,²⁵ but all the main passages on bribery are in the OT. For Hays, *community* does not refer to the character of an individual, but to the corporate obedience of the church, while I believe that the matter of bribery relates to the character of the individual. The *cross* and *new creation* cannot be applied because there is no suffering, cross-bearing, or eschatology in the matter of bribery.²⁶

Hays criticises the use of "love" as a way to synthesize all the Biblical materials, and puts it under the focal image "cross." I would agree that love is related to the cross, but it plays a more prominent role than what Hays offers. God sent Jesus to the cross because of love; it was God's primary motivation.

Love does not meet Hays' first criterion, because in a number of NT books, it is not a central theme. While his criticism may be good, this still leaves the question as to

²² Noonan, "Bribery," 85-86.

²³ Cf. Nichols, "A Case," 30.

²⁴ Hays, *Vision*, 4-5, 194-195.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 198.

²⁶ Cf. Hays' inconsistency in using the *cross* image in Dale B. Martin, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard B. Hays, *JBL* 117/2 (1998): 358-360.

²⁷ Hays, *Vision*, 200.

whether he presents a strong argument for his own proposal.²⁷ He gives an example: Mark's gospel does not teach love, which is not true. This Gospel gives many examples where Jesus healed people (3:1-6), raised someone from the dead (5:35-43), and fed them (6:32-44). It is obvious from the context that these were acts of love. Jesus directly taught people to love (12:28-34). Hays writes: "The most striking evidence, however, comes from the Acts of the Apostles. Nowhere in this book does the word 'love' appear."²⁸ However, we need to remember that this book is a history, not a doctrinal argument or moral treatise; nevertheless, the principle is there. There are several cases where the apostles healed people (Ac 28:8). The book talks much about the forgiveness of sins. We know that God forgives *because* of love.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 201.

It seems that the bribery passages may be better synthesised by "love." We should not bribe or take a bribe because of love for others. If we bribe a person, pushing him to break laws, we are not acting lovingly toward that person, although we may be motivated by love for someone else. If we take a bribe and break laws, we are not acting out of love since someone may suffer because of our disobedience.

Hermeneutical task: As a part of the hermeneutical process, let us look at possible solutions to the issue based on different ethical theories.

Deontological ethics (moralism): Moralism argues that goodness and evil are intrinsic to an act or an actor. Certain actions are wrong in and of themselves, no matter how they affect the world. This approach draws the line at a certain point and says that if human behaviour crosses this line, it is wrong, regardless of motives. Thus, those who say that bribery is always wrong support this position. There are clear moral rules derived from Scripture, reason, or society. These moral absolutes cannot be violated under any circumstances.

The biggest problem with moralism is that a person's choice of moral rules is likely to be deeply related to the culture. No one follows all the rules of the Bible, so determining what is absolute requires selection. Bribery may feel wrong to me because it is considered illegal in my culture. To someone from another context, small-scale bribery may seem perfectly all right.²⁹

²⁹ Adeney, *Virtues*, 146.

Moralism ignores the fact that moral rules sometimes conflict with each other. Moralism can lead to self-righteousness. That is why some people use different rules according to their power in a given situation. In this way, situational ethics has become a popular attempt to escape the danger of moralism.

Teleological ethics: According to this approach, goodness lies not in an act or actor but in the act's real effect on the real world. It emphasises the end result, or goal. To bribe may be good if it helps many people. For example, we can bribe an official to build a church building more quickly in order to save more sinners. The result of an action, however, cannot be measured in the short term; we need to consider long-term results as well.

Situational ethics is an example of the teleological approach, but it emphasises the context. Every situation should be judged on the basis of love, i.e. what is the most loving thing to do in this situation? On the other hand, goodness is determined by motivation – does the action spring from love? A different approach is based on a realistic calculation of what action will most effectively show love to those involved. Situational ethics recognises the primacy of love and the uniqueness of each individual circumstance, but it has many problems. There is the danger of subjective rationalization. Almost anything can be justified by an appeal to love.³⁰ Morality by calculation assumes that it is possible to know the moral result of an action; however, the moral result of an action is often unknowable, even after the event. Perhaps a bribe may be paid out of love when the person we pay has a material need, but we cannot know the result for certain. He may use this money to buy alcohol.

We do not know what love is apart from a given context. Love may be the highest norm, but it is not the only one. In the case of bribery, other principles such as justice, honesty, gentleness, and obedience to the state cannot be ignored. Situational ethics overestimates the power of an individual to calculate and bring about loving results without the restraints of law and community.³¹ But there are absolute moral principles that reflect the character of God.

Absolute moral principles: Some Christians see bribery as one of these absolutes. Bribery is seen as a form of

³⁰ E.g. A woman has an abortion to save her unborn child from future poverty and hunger.

³¹ Adeney, *Virtues*, 148-150.

dishonesty, of cheating. They reject any compromise and are willing to resist the pressure to smooth their way with money. Bribery may fit into this absolute category if a moral condemnation is included in the definition of bribery. If a bribe is defined as a gift intended to corrupt an official and cause him to act unjustly, then it must always be wrong to bribe.³² We can define a bribe as a gift given to obtain illegal favours. If so, then gifts to obtain just service can be called tips.

³² Ibid., 150.

Some Christians reject an absolute prohibition of bribes because they believe that what a Westerner calls a bribe may be a necessary mechanism for sharing wealth in poor countries. Thus, the money offered is not meant to corrupt, but to “expedite a sluggish process,” and perhaps this is what Pr 18:16 intends. If a small gift is freely given to obtain better service and there is no fear or threat involved, it is possible to consider it a tip; otherwise, the service would take much longer. Small gifts paid to poor officials are ambiguous because they occupy a large area between a gift, a tip, and a bribe. They may help establish a relationship of trust and mutual help, but they are also underlined with the threat of poor service and time delay.³³

³³ Ibid., 151-152.

Falkiner disagrees with this approach. A bribe cannot be a gift. A gift is given in the context of a relationship to express a feeling. A bribe is not an expression of relationship; it is an attempt to exploit a person for selfish gain. The size of the gift is irrelevant;³⁴ the size of the bribe is equivalent to the task performed. A tip is known and consented to by the employer, while a bribe is hidden from the employer. A tip is given as a small bonus to reward past service and influence future service. A bribe is given in such a size that it creates an overriding obligation to perform a task. A tip is given to low-level employees. A bribe is given to those with discretionary powers.³⁵

³⁴ This is not an absolute truth; it may vary from culture to culture.

³⁵ Falkiner, “Bribery,” 25-26.

Prima facie ethics may justify bad actions, but those actions are necessarily evil. The consequences will follow. The necessary evil in these actions will affect the actor, the people immediately involved, and the broader society. The effect is not only personal, but also social. That is why moral rules, on the face of it, should never be broken. The prima facie category may only be broken to avert some

greater evil. Unlike in situation ethics, prima facie rules are not nullified by moral calculation.³⁶

Augustine suggested that every other command of God must be filtered through the command to love God and your neighbour (Mt 22:40). The love commandment does not set aside the other commands, but interprets their true meaning in a concrete situation. Unlike situation ethics, love is not all that matters, but love is *part of* all that matters. All moral situations receive their true weight in relation to the love of God and neighbour. So, if a bribe is given to get illegal service, then a bribe is a prima facie evil. Each case of bribery undermines the cause of justice in society by making it difficult for the poor to be treated fairly. On the other hand, it is possible to conceive of situations where refusing to pay a bribe may do greater harm.³⁷ The danger of the prima facie category is that it may become an easy way out, a means of justifying actions we know are wrong.

Almost everything can be justified if we argue in the right way and feel strongly enough about it. Results are not only unpredictable, but are also based on the ability of fallen human nature to judge correctly. Also, making a judgment for the greater good assumes that the one making the judgment is able to predict accurately the final outcome of the action. Who can accurately gauge the long-term effects of an act of bribery on a person and society?³⁸ Many moral situations are not determined either by absolute moral principles or by prima facie commandments.

Relative moral situations: Many decisions are relative to a particular situation. What is a bribe in the West is considered a tip in the East, a way to maintain or achieve right relationships. The moral choice for a certain situation would be unique to a particular person, time, or place. We need to understand the context deeply. Culture plays a major role in making morally relative decisions. Sometimes the definition of a bribe and the meaning of a particular gift may be relative to the cultural intentions and expectations of those involved. The relative moral decisions we make are ultimately grounded in the absolute core values that guide our lives. They grow out of our habitual praxis, our knowledge of our context, and our relationship to a community and the gift of God's wisdom and guidance.³⁹

³⁶ Adeney, *Virtues*, 154-155.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 155.

³⁸ Falkiner, "Bribery," 24.

³⁹ Adeney, *Virtues*, 157-158.

Falkiner disagrees that the culture decides whether we can accept bribery or not. If cultural acceptance were the only measure, then slavery in the eighteenth century southern United States would have to be considered moral, along with cannibalism in certain tribes. Culture can only be seen as absolute if we deny the existence of any universal absolutes.⁴⁰ “We must remember that Bible is for all cultures, for all times and for all social classes.”⁴¹

⁴⁰ Falkiner, “Bribery,” 22.

⁴¹ Nichols, “A Case,” 31.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 32.

In Ukraine, which was part of Russia and then part of the USSR, it was always illegal to bribe. I would disagree with Nichols, who wrote that bribery was part of the communistic system.⁴² It was very dangerous to pay or take a bribe at that time; a person caught would spend several years in prison, which would then influence his whole life. There was no need for an official to risk his position or his freedom by accepting bribes. Salaries were not high, but sufficient to feed a family, pay expenses, and put some money in the bank. With the fall of the USSR, the economies of the newly-formed countries collapsed. People did not have enough money to buy food; the number of unemployed grew. The law system changed; not many people followed the law anymore. The government tried to deal with “big crimes,” paying little attention to “small crimes,” like bribery. Many officials started to use their positions to earn money through taking bribes. People still considered bribery something wrong, but they had less fear of being caught, and the practice grew. Bribes had to be paid to accomplish certain things. It does not matter if this is legal or illegal action. The perspective of Ukrainian Christians was always against bribery. Part of the argument was that bribery is against the law; it will destroy justice; and, in spite of big changes in government, all Ukrainians consider bribery illegal, even if they pay it or accept it.

In society, gifts were simply a means of strengthening established relationships and rewarding good works. In a modern bureaucracy, relationships have to be established without the benefit of a clear social order. If a country is very poor, with high unemployment and a large, underpaid bureaucracy, civil servants are, in effect, paid with power and prestige rather than money. They must use their power to receive gifts if they are to support a family.⁴³ This was always a part of Ukrainian culture. Good

⁴³ Adeney, *Virtues*, 159.

relationships must be supported by small gifts. But the size of the gift depended on people's positions. Sometimes services work like gifts. One official will help another so that when he needs help, the second one may help him.

Bribery involves oppressing the powerless. Justice and service go to the highest bidder. Those able to pay bribes in a government office get their permit processed immediately, while those who are unable to pay must wait until all of the bribers have been served. We have to consider the principle of equity in justice (Isa 1:23). When we pay a bribe to get better service, are we better than the person who cannot pay? Gifts, especially large gifts given to obtain a basic service, easily become a means of oppression. As a result of such a gift, those who cannot or will not pay may be denied even minimal justice.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Ibid., 150.

We have to consider love as a motivation and guiding principle. We are not acting out of love if we pay a bribe to get preferred treatment, such as being moved to the head of a line (Mt 22:39). Jesus counseled us to treat others as we want to be treated (Mt 7:12).

Bribery also has negative consequences for the person who receives the bribe. Bribes corrupt people (Ecc 7:7). The Bible teaches us to love our neighbours, not corrupt them. Even if the person who takes bribes is relatively corrupt before we bribe them, our contribution adds to their guilt and reinforces their corruption.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Falkiner, "Bribery," 25-26.

Such problems show that many in authority use their government post for unjust profit (Ecc 8:9). Christians must cope with the present system. This may mean recognizing local situations wherein public servants expect gifts for performing their job. Some Christians may feel that, as their turn in line comes, they can comply with the practice of the land to give a "gift" to get an official to do what his job requires. Of course, in lands where such "gifts" are not customary, or they are shocking to public sensibilities, a Christian will act in a way that does not cause others to stumble (1Co 10:31-33).

If an official is delaying action, or misinterpreting the law, it would not be unbiblical to offer a "gift," and it does not contradict Scripture. For example, a tradesman needs a permit before he can work. He pays the official fee at the government office, yet everyone knows that without a "gift" his papers will be kept on the bottom of the pile.

While he is not asking to be put ahead of others, if he gives the normal “tip,” his paper will be properly handled.

Suppose a church is building a building. The law states that the corridor cannot be less than six feet wide. The church’s project was approved and the building was finished, but during the contract period a new law was enacted stating that the corridor cannot be less than eight feet wide. An inspector who came to look at it said that he could not sign the papers because the corridor was too narrow. The church people know that they are right, so they have an option—pay a small gift and have their papers signed, or go to court and try to solve this problem through the judiciary system, which will take much more money.

When we give a bribe to violate the law, we must consider how God will look at us. We must also consider how other people will see us, what kind of witnesses we are. Paul mentioned this in Ro 14:21. He applied it to believers, but this principle may be applied to unbelievers also.⁴⁶ There is a danger if you bribe once: Officials will know about it and expect you to pay a bribe the second and third time, and so on. If you refuse to pay, they will block your path.

⁴⁶ Also 2Co 6:3.

Another factor is obedience to law. Jesus urged: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mk 12:17; Mt 17:24-27). It is one thing if a Christian who has not broken the law is expected to “tip” a government employee or another official. But what if a Christian actually has violated the law? In that case, how could he, in good conscience, offer a bribe to induce an officer to ignore the violation? Paul wrote that we should fear superior authorities which are empowered “to execute wrath on the one who practices evil” (Ro 13:3-4). Paul’s own position was that if he did wrong, he would accept the appropriate punishment. (Ac 25:10-11). Thus, a Christian who violated a traffic law might have to pay a fine as directed by an officer or a judge.

Paul also said that governments are “ministers to you for your good.” Despite the greed of some officials, governments do provide services for the public good. For instance, officials inspect automobiles as to their roadworthiness, and they examine whether buildings are in compliance with fire codes. Therefore, if a Christian felt that, within the law, he could “tip” an official who expect-

ed a “service fee,” it is evident that this is quite different from bribing an inspector to ignore violations of the law.

The strongest argument against accepting bribery as a cultural norm is that virtually every nation of the world has laws prohibiting it.⁴⁷ The common denominator is that a perversion of justice has taken place. Both the giver and the receiver of the bribe are guilty. In contrast, extortion withholds justice and services that are rightfully due a person, or that should be provided without charge.⁴⁸

Bribery is one of the major factors preventing economic, political, and social development. Bribery is a barrier preventing people from loving each other. The ability to break through the system depends on the power an individual has, what is at risk, and what values are at stake. Ukraine is considered a Christian country, but there is only a small percentage of Protestant Christian churches. The Orthodox consider these churches sects, so many people will not listen to their opinion. Only those who can afford to go without the services of bureaucrats, who can afford to wait, who have the power and education to appeal to higher levels, whose goodwill and service are needed by the country, or who have a connection to a powerful elite in the country have the ability to break the system.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Falkiner, “Bribery,” 23.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁹ Adeney, *Virtues*, 160.

CONCLUSION

Bribery is a large, multi-faceted problem. The Bible gives many examples of bribery and even some passages are ambiguous concerning the question of right or wrong. In general, it appears that God forbids this practice. The Bible presents a rule against *shohadh*-takers, unjust judges, and also presents the ideal of a God-Judge above *shohadh*. Bribery leads to violation of the law. In trying to build this paper on Hays’ methodology, we determined that his three focal images are useless in speaking to the bribery question, which can better be solved by “love.” We have also considered possible solutions based on different ethical theories. Certain types of bribery are absolutely wrong. Paying money to subvert justice or hide one’s own evil is clearly wrong. We need to avoid situations of value conflict. When confronted with tragic circumstances we cannot control, we need to know how to choose higher values over lesser values. While some kinds of bribery are

absolutely wrong, some may be wrong but unavoidable. While it is wrong to pay bribes, it may be less significant than the values that would be lost if we refused to pay. Most of what we call bribery is evil and cannot be done without consequences that hurt other people more than the briber. Sometimes we need to consider the cultural context of where we are. What is considered a bribe in the West is only a tip in other countries. What may be right for one situation may be wrong for another. We may conclude that accepting a bribe is wrong because we violate laws. Giving bribes may also be wrong because we push another person to break laws.

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