

# CHRISTIANS AND BRIBERY

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## INTRODUCTION

Currently, bribery is a confirmed infection that is regularly found among Nigerians (*emphasis mine*<sup>1</sup>).

The Corruption Perception Index (CPI) is an annual survey report published by Berlin-based *Transparency International* since 1995 which ranks countries by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, as determined by expert assessments and opinion surveys.

The CPI scales zero (0) to 100, zero means "Highly Corrupt," while 100 stands for "Very Clean".

In 2020, Nigeria has a score of 25 out of 100 points.

In January 2021, Nigeria, was ranked the 2nd most corrupt country in West Africa - *Transparency International*,

You don't have to search very long to find cases of bribery in Nigerian politics, businesses and even religion.

It is almost impossible in practice to make a living, travel across town, or dwell in peace in a community, without giving or receiving bribes.

Bribery seems to be a normal and customary part of business, religion and politics.

We see those who have the power to demand bribes, those who receive bribes reluctantly but without protest, and those who give and receive bribes with joy and pride.

Too many of those in power seem to serve their own interests rather than

the interests of the people whom they were chosen to serve.

We have heard of some leaders (both religious and secular) who have been exposed for perverting justice, because of money.

Due to bribery, poor people and minorities argue that no justice is available for them. The cries of the weak and needy most often, go unheeded.

Modern workplaces, societies, and religious bodies are susceptible to bribery, corruption, and bias.

It has always been so from generation to generation.

Bribery was mentioned during the times under which the Israelites lived under.

## THE PRINCIPLE OF BRIBERY

**Deuteronomy 16:18-20** - *You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God is giving you.*

Moses here provided in a general way for the appointment of two levels of court officials in every town.

The first group, called "judges," were probably the leaders of local

councils of elders. The second group, are the “officers” who may have had some of the functions of a modern policeman.

The judges and officers were told to judge the people with just judgment.

Whatever their function, Moses, in **verse 19**, gave three admonitions to explain what it meant for these officials to “*judge the people with just judgment.*”

The first admonition was for the officials not to *pervert the course of justice in any form and for any person.*

Sometimes, some persons *pervert* justice for the powerful, rich or highly connected. Others *pervert* justice only for the strangers, the widow, the orphan, the needy or the helpless.

Whether to the powerful or helpless, rich or poor – *perversion of justice* is prohibited by God (for it is a sin). Jesus confirmed this prohibition in **Matthew 23:23** - *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.*

The second admonition was for the officials not to *be partial.*

This means that in delivering just judgment, they should not recognize faces, they should show no favoritism irrespective of personal or family relationships or because of the social standing or wealth of the people whose cases were being heard.

If your husband does a wrong, you tell him in love that he has acted wrongly. Same applies to a father, mother, wife, child, brother, sister, friend or relative.

This act of speaking the truth in love applies to all classes of persons (rich or poor).

If a leader is in sin or involved in an error, one has to speak the truth in love to him, in the Bible recommended

procedure. This has to be done irrespective of tribal, marital or societal bonding.

Compare scriptural objection phase in a selection process.

The New Testament forbids Christians to show partiality or favoritism in dealings with one another in the church (**James 2:1-13**).

**James 2:1** says that we should not *hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.*

**James 2:2-4** says when we treat people based on their wealth, social class, or race, we have *shown partiality among ourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts.*

To treat people differently because of their wealth *is partiality.* To favor the rich or the poor, *is partiality.* To despise the poor or the rich *is partiality.*

**James 2:9** says when we *show partiality, we have committed sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors* in exactly the same way as the person who committed hatred, jealousy, malice, murder, adultery, fornication, lying, etc.

The third admonition was for the officials not to *take a bribe.*

*Why?* Because a bribe makes one, even a wise person, to be blind to truth and justice. It causes one to reject or disregard truth and justice intentionally. It twists the words of a righteous man. It makes a righteous person to be double minded, untrustworthy and to lie.

**Deuteronomy 16:18-20** makes it clear that perversion of justice, showing partiality and bribery, cannot exist independently. They go hand in hand, strung together into one piece ‘sin’.

If we are involved in perversion of justice, it means we have shown partiality. It also means that there is the inevitable tendency that we will give or receive bribe.

If we are involved in bribery, surely, we will pervert justice and show partiality.

Therefore, bribery is any sinful act, in the form of giving and receiving of bribe that arises from or leads to perversion of justice and showing partiality.

## EXAMPLES OF BRIBERY

### 1. The Lords of the Philistines and Delilah

**Judges 16:4-5** - Afterward it happened that Samson loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Entice him, and find out where his great strength *lies*, and by what *means* we may overpower him, that we may bind him to afflict him; and every one of us will give you eleven hundred *pieces* of silver."

Delilah was offered a huge bribe (eleven hundred *pieces* of silver) by the lords of the Philistines. This bribe is for her to discover the secret of Samson's strength.

1,100 pieces of silver, for such a discovery. In terms of current value of the naira, she was offered over three million naira.

Many have been betrayed by relatives, spouses, friends, colleagues, or neighbours, who were offered huge bribe.

Judges have yielded to pervert justice when they discovered their spouses had already received bribe on their behalf

Delilah in turn offered a huge bribe, by offering her body as a sexual tool, applied all of her feminine charm.

In **Judges 16:16, 19** - we saw that she pestered Samson daily with her words and pressed him, so that his soul was vexed to death.

Samson took her bribe and became blinded to his destiny; he could not see clearly the purpose of his life – which was to be the deliverer of Israel from Philistine oppression. He revealed what should not be revealed after several lies.

Even after she had discovered the secret, she still used all of her feminine charm, as a bribe, to make Samson sleep on her knees or lap before they shave off the seven locks of his head.

Here we must understand that the world believes that a bribe can be given in any form and we Christians must be aware of this.

A bribe could be in the form of a political appointment, a contract, an employment, a promotion, sexual provocation [*our sisters need to take caution here in their dress styles or appearance before the opposite sex – emphasis mine*] or in monetary terms.

The world believes that every human (inclusive of Christians) has a price, which to them implies, to a high degree that upon pressure and with a well packaged bribe, anyone can yield to evil or corruption.

The world believes in applying pressure and provision of a bribe too huge to reject.

Let's pray fervently about this and take caution. We must renew our minds to reject their ideology. We must not relax, after resisting the first, second or third temptation of bribery. We must continue to resist bribery.

**James 4:7** - *Therefore, submit to God. Resist [no time applied – keep resisting – emphasis mine] the devil and he will flee from you.*

### 2. The Sons of Samuel

**1 Samuel 8:3** - *But his sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice.*

Here, the sons of Samuel, were determined to get money by hook or by crook. This love of money made them to take bribes; (which could be gifts or presents) so that they make themselves blinded to their purposes as just judges. The result is that they perverted just judgment.

They were literally selling judgment to the highest bidder: thus, the wicked rich man had his cause, and the poor man was oppressed and deprived of his right.

On December 9, 2021, the Punch Newspaper published a statement made by the former INEC chairman - Jega, in his lecture at Owolabi Afuye Memorial Lecture organized by the Nigerian Bar Association, Ibadan branch.

Mr. Jega stated that some corrupt judges sell election cases (judgment) to the highest bidders and quickly retired to avoid being sanctioned by the National Judicial Council (NJC).

The end result was that the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and demanded that he made for them a king to judge them like all the nations (*1 Samuel 8:4-6*).

We see this happening in our country today. Most winners of court cases are the highest bidders – the ones with the huge bribe – too huge to reject.

The lesson here is that our positions, in the church, workplaces, community, schools, societies etc., could be used as a tempting ground by Satan and the world, to present us bribes. Thus, we must not abuse any God-given position and we must be free from the love of money.

### 3. Judas Iscariot and the Chief Priests

*Matthew 26:14-15* - Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?"

And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. So, from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him.

Judas had one of the highest of privileges in life, considering the fact that he had enjoyed a rich and wonderful fellowship with Jesus, living as a member of His band of chosen men.

They had walked the dusty roads together and taught the multitudes side by side. Jesus had no doubt sent him out with the others on apostolic missions.

But Judas gave the devil a place to live in his heart; as time passed, the devil's purpose became more and more dominant within him.

He demanded for a bribe. He was given a bribe that he could not reject. And waited for the opportune time to inform Jesus' enemies about the best place and the best circumstances to make the arrest.

The lesson here is that bribery doesn't usually happen all at once. It is something we must have pondered on. Bribery is usually a long, slow, gradual, growing process. It sometimes starts out with little things.

But we must appreciate the highest of all God-given opportunities, especially as a child of God otherwise our hearts will be open to evil imaginations and lead us to sin.

### 4. Soldiers Who Guarded the Tomb of Jesus and the Chief Priests

In *Matthew 28:11-15* - we have the record of how the chief priests with the elders consulted together, and gave a large sum of money as bribe to the soldiers, so that the soldiers will lie that Jesus' disciples came at night and stole Him away while they slept.' And this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

## 5. Simon the Sorcerer

In **Acts 8:18-20**, we read of Simon who offered the apostles money (*a bribe*) so that they can give him the power of the Holy Spirit.

Though he was rebuked but what we must learn is that we should never use our wealth to influence people to do wrong or pervert justice.

## 6. Members of the Church

Some members of the church have used their tribal affiliation, as a bribe, to cause other members to ignore the truth, create factions within the church and spread gossips to hinder the progress of the church.

We have also seen members who in recognition of those who are wealthy in the church and for what they have benefited or will benefit financially from such wealthy brethren, have decided to pervert just judgment, in certain matters, which does not favour such wealthy brethren.

## 7. Companies and Individuals

We hear of many companies and individuals who have been convicted of giving out bribes to secure a contract.

In a way to prevent bribery or stop the spread of bribery, most companies have made policies against employees receiving gifts from clients and suppliers.

Also, there are records of companies and individuals that give bribe to escape being convicted of tax evasion.

## 8. Employment Officers

Employment in some sectors is found by paying bribe to those who are fortunate to decide who gets employed (*politicians, managers, MDs, consulting firms, panel of interviewers*).

Bribery is so infectious that sometimes some qualified persons are

left with no option but to pay before they are employed.

## 9. Court Officials

It has become almost customary for court judgment to be delayed in our courts, as long as the judges have received bribe and with the intent of those who gave the bribe to ensure that those who are seeking justice, do not have any hope of bringing money to continue the court case.

We have also seen court cases, in which the judges instantly pervert just judgment, at the appearance of dangerous, and highly placed individuals, in the court premises.

Also, there are judges who gives wrong judgment against a person simply because they don't like person involved in the case.

When a person doesn't like another person, he sees everything another person does wrong in his view. The good things are there, but they are ignored.

Such a judge looks only at a man's face instead of at the facts of the case, and makes a decision based on whether or not he likes the man (*Lenski, 1961, p. 418*).

## 10. Policemen and Military Officers

On our high ways, even within streets, we have seen most policemen and military officers, demanding and receiving bribe from drivers and even passers-by.

In their respective stations, this act is committed to even free a guilty person and arrest and/or murders an innocent party.

All members of the police or armed forces who are Christians must abide the instruction given in **Luke 3:14** - *Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" So, he said to them, "Do not intimidate*

*anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages."*

## 11. Politicians

Most politicians taking advantage of their position to load their own wallets.

It has been proven that caucus-members of the Nigerian Senate and House of representative, ensure that huge bribe is inserted in the country's budget before they will approve it.

### Padding of Budget

## 12. Customs Officials & Clearing Agents

In the course of clearing of goods at the sea or airport, many custom officials and clearing agents have suggested bribes to their owners of goods and clients, in order to reduce the cost of clearing. In the same way, owners of goods have given bribes to custom officials and clearing agents

## 13. Citizens and BEDC

Sometimes, we give out bribes to BEDC officials in order to restore light illegally.

Also BEDC officials has demanded bribes on occasions before they perform their duties.

## EFFECTS OF BRIBERY

Moses charged the Israelites to avoid every evil including bribery. He added that failure to avoid it – they will not live and it would make it impossible for them to inherit the land which the LORD God was giving them.

In the Christian era, our involvement in bribery *(which seems pleasurable in a carnal sense)* makes us spiritually dead while we still live - **1 Timothy 5:6** - *But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives.*

Bribery makes us wicked persons before God. **Proverbs 17:23** - A wicked

man accepts a bribe behind the back to pervert the ways of justice.

Bribery creates double standards. Think about it, would you expect a government administration which is deeply involved in bribery to uphold the laws concerning bribery and corruption? Clearly, the answer is **no**.

Bribery leads to oppression, perversion of justice and partiality. Many persons are punished for things that they have not done and others are free who have committed crimes.

By giving a bribe we become a partner in making someone blind to justice, to cause injustice for others, and corrupt the heart of the person receiving it. By participating in this evil deed, you are supporting it.

One of the greatest barriers to economic growth in many countries is the introduction of lapses into the rule of law, that gives room for bribery.

It makes the world to ridicule the validity of our Christianity. [cf. **Romans 2:24** - *For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," as it is written.*]

Bribery is a sin; an abomination and it defiles us. It hinders us from making heaven. **Revelation 21:22,27** - *But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.*

## LEAVING BRIBERY

Surely every age and every country need judges and officers who will not pervert justice, who will be impartial, and who will not give or take a bribe.

Truly, such standards will be hard to live up to unless the judges and officers are willing to model themselves

after the only Righteous Judge, the God of Moses and of Jesus.

Since every human is susceptible to bribery, corruption, and bias, it becomes a risk to model ourselves after ourselves.

There is this tendency (though not in all cases) our models may turnaround to commit bribery and when they are caught up in such act, it tends to weaken our former resolve not to be involved in bribery.

God has to be the only standard - **Deuteronomy 10:17-18** - *For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.*

When the first Gentile was converted to Christianity, apostle Peter in **Acts 10:34-35**, *opened his mouth and said: in truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.*

Ignorance of the various forms of bribery does not mean that God's laws on bribery, do not apply to us.

Some think that if they are not aware of law or if they don't understand a particular law, then it would not be fair to apply such law to them.

If such thinking was true, many would have made efforts to never learn a particular law so that it would not apply to them.

However, we might think, God says that His laws apply to us, whether we know them or not.

**Leviticus 5:17** - *If a person sins, and commits any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the Lord, though he does not know it, yet he is guilty and shall bear his iniquity.*

Bribery is a sin. If we are involved, this is not time to give excuses or make a justification.

We have to take responsibility that we have sinned. We have to pray to God for forgiveness and deliverance. We have to seek godly counsels. We have to take real actions to come out of it.

## CONCLUSION

Man can be bribed but we cannot bribe God.

*And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear - I Peter 1:17.*

We are bound to lose certain rights, gifts, promotions, or privileges whenever we refuse to give or take bribe. But it is the right price to pay considering the eternal value of our souls.

Bribery has always been wrong. Bribery is a sin which must be repented from. It is a crime by human law.

Therefore, we must do whatever we can to avoid, repent from and reduce bribery, as a contribution to the *just judgment* mentioned in **Deuteronomy 16:18-20**, which is sacred to the Lord.

## WORKS CITED

Truth For Today (1997, 1998). *Deuteronomy, Judge, Priest, Prophet, And King.*

Paul Rogers (1988, 2005). *Judges 13—16, The Strongest and Weakest Man in The Old Testament Truth for Today*

<sup>1</sup> *It can also be found in other nations.*