

## **Biblical perspectives on corruption and conflicts of interest**

### **The character of God**

A biblical perspective on corruption and conflicts of interest starts with the very character of God himself revealed in the Bible. A key passage is Deuteronomy 10:17:

*For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing.*

In this passage the character of God is first expressed negatively, he 'shows no partiality and accepts no bribes'. God is the judge over all human beings who treats each individual with impartial justice and cannot be manipulated through bribery, or attempts to exert corrupt influence. But then God's justice and character is expressed positively in that he actively works to defend those who are vulnerable to abuse, orphans, widows and immigrants.

God's concern for honesty and just business relationships is also shown in the scriptures. For instance in Proverbs 11:1 are the striking words, '*The LORD detests dishonest scales, but accurate weights find favour with him*'. The same concept is repeated several times in Proverbs. *Differing weights and differing measures, Both of them are abominable to the LORD.* Proverbs 20:10

*A just balance and scales belong to the LORD; All the weights of the bag are His concern.*  
Proverbs 16:11

A similar passage is Leviticus 19:35,36. *You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measurement of weight, or capacity. You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin; I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt.*

As many biblical scholars have pointed out, Yahweh, the God of Israel, was strikingly different from the other gods of the ancient world, such as Baal and Marduk. Whereas all the gods were concerned about the details of how ritual worship was carried out in the temples and high places, only Yahweh was equally concerned about every aspect of ordinary life, including what happened in the market place, the eating house and the bedroom.

God's abhorrence of partiality and bribery is seen in 2 Chronicles 19:7 '*Now then let the fear of the LORD be upon you; be very careful what you do, for the LORD our God will have no part in unrighteousness or partiality or the taking of a bribe.*' 2 Chronicles 19:7

God's character is also revealed in the Ten Commandments and his prohibition of covenant breaking, stealing, lying and coveting the property of others.

## **We are called to live in a way consistent with God's character**

A constant theme throughout the Bible is that we, God's people, are called to act in a way consistent with God's own character.

*"Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy'". Deuteronomy 18:13*

*'You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect'. Matthew 5:48*

## **Bribery**

The bible is clear about the evil consequences of bribery:

*You shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of the just. Exodus 23:8*

*A wicked man receives a bribe from the bosom to pervert the ways of justice. Proverbs 17:23*

*Cursed is he who accepts a bribe to strike down an innocent person. Deuteronomy 27:25*

*The king gives stability to the land by justice, but a man who takes bribes overthrows it. Proverbs 29:4*

Bribery not only perverts the process of justice, and damages those who are vulnerable, but it threatens the very stability of the structures of society.

Bribery also has negative effects on the core of our personal being and integrity, the heart, which is described as the wellspring of life. *For oppression makes a wise man mad, and a bribe corrupts the heart. Ecclesiastes 7:7*

Yet the book of Proverbs also acknowledges that bribery may be effective in gaining access to the rich and powerful and in placating the angry.

*A man's gift makes room for him, and brings him before great men. Proverbs 18:16*

*A gift in secret subdues anger, and a bribe in the bosom, strong wrath. Proverbs 21:14*

Yet despite the apparent effectiveness of bribery, God's people, and particularly the rulers and those in position of power, should stand out against it

*But you should select from all the people able men, God-fearing, trustworthy, and hating bribes. Place [them] over the people as officials of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. Exodus 18:21*

*Do not deny justice or show partiality [to anyone]. Do not accept a bribe, for it blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. Deuteronomy 16:19*

*You are to look for capable men among the people, men who fear God, men of integrity who hate dishonest gain. Exodus 18:21*

## **Partiality**

Partiality is to treat individuals with special favour because of their family connections, their friendships, riches, social status, race and so on. Just as God does not show partiality in his dealings with human-kind, so we are called to act in the same way.

*You are not to be unjust in deciding a case. You are not to show partiality to the poor or honour the great. Instead, decide the case of your neighbour with righteousness. Leviticus 19:15*

*Do not show partiality when rendering judgment; listen to small and great alike. Do not be intimidated by anyone, for judgment belongs to God. Deuteronomy 1:17*

*To show partiality is not good, because for a piece of bread a man will transgress. Proverbs 28:21*

## **Integrity**

A positive understanding of living in accordance with biblical principles is expressed in the concept of integrity.

*The integrity of the upright will guide them, But the crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them. Proverbs 11:3*

*Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than he who is perverse in speech and is a fool. Proverbs 19:1*

It is interesting that the word “integrity” is used in medicine to mean “intact”, “functional” or “healthy”. Orthopaedic surgeons talk about the integrity of a joint, for example. So to have moral integrity is to be morally intact, to be internally healthy. This implies a match between my internal principles, convictions and intentions and my external actions. Conversely when I act in a way which violates my moral principles I am damaged internally, I become morally impaired, in biblical language my heart is corrupted.

## **The Nolan principles and biblical integrity**

The seven Nolan principles can be seen as being consistent with a biblical understanding of integrity:

1. Selflessness
2. Integrity
3. Objectivity
4. Accountability
5. Openness
6. Honesty
7. Leadership

To be continued.....

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