

The power of selfishness is strong. It can break up marriages and families. Selfishness has the power to destroy any relationship. In the form of corruption, selfishness can break an entire nation.

Transparency International, one of the many organisations that fight against corruption, gives a short definition: “Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain.”

Corruption occurs everywhere

A traffic official who pulls you over after a traffic offence – or alleged offence – and then indicates that you can avoid a heavy fine by paying a bribe.

A state official who promises that you will receive a licence or document quickly if there is “something” in it for him or her. According to *Transparency International*, 47% of South Africans admit to having paid a bribe in the year 2012-2013.

With regard to tenders and tender procedures, there is a lot of corruption through which people enrich themselves. Corruption does not occur solely among government officials. The corruption culture has even taken a hold in some of our most respected companies and businesses.

Often, people who call themselves Christians are also involved with corruption.

The destructive power of corruption

Corruption damages the whole country’s economy

Business trust, entrepreneurship and investments suffer serious damages. Who would want to invest their money in a country with so much corruption? The poor are suffering the most. Money for job creation and upliftment projects ends up in the pockets of corrupt officials. Adv. Paul Hoffman of the Institute for Accountability in Southern Africa states that since 1994, R675 billion has been lost in the government service through corruption (*Beeld*, 5 September 2013).

The social consequences are the worst

Corruption causes us to mistrust each other and the societal institutions.

Thousands of government officials are running businesses that receive contracts from the departments where they work. There are many examples of police officers who are involved in corruption. Cadre recruitment, corruption and incompetence among political leaders as well as municipal officials are considered the main causes for the wretched condition of municipalities in this country. In 2013, only nine of 278 received a clean audit from the auditor general, Terence Nombembe. That is a mere 3%! (*Citizen*, 15 August 2013).

If leaders in the police and other state departments are corrupt, how can we trust people? And why should I be different if that is how my leaders act? Shouldn’t I then also just go out to take what I can get? Corruption destroys our moral fibre.

Corruption destroys people’s hope for a better future.

Government institutions that grant tenders to companies with strong political affiliations is a great problem. People close to politicians receive the most money for development and upliftment projects, in return for favours. It is not the people who wait the longest for homes that get them, but people who can mean the most to politicians. Without healthy, open competition, services to the country’s citizens are more expensive and of lower quality. People lose their trust in the future. Once people lose hope and become cynical, they no longer care about what they do.

Corruption leads to long-term harm being done to the environment.

Streams, rivers and underground water sources are being polluted by raw sewage since 2006. According to the South African Institute for Civil Engineers, the pollution is “untenable” and the levels of *E.coli* bacteria in the rivers and streams of Mpumalanga has reached “catastrophic levels” (*Beeld*, 19 September 2013). Due to bad management, incompetent officials and corrupt practices, municipalities cannot maintain their sewage systems.

It is frightening to fly over large parts of Mpumalanga. Precious wetlands and agricultural land has been poisoned by opencast coal mines. Rumours have it that mining licences and environmental assessment certificates are issued in corrupt ways.

We must pay attention to moral formation in our society

Because corruption is mostly intertwined with phenomena such as indifference, selfishness, unfair benefit, secrecy, cunning business practices, fraud, theft and blackmail, we have to acknowledge that our society is experiencing a morality crisis. A morality crisis means that families, cultural groups, schools and religious communities do not succeed in forming people with good character. If people do not do what is right and good based on inner values, we are doomed. Strict laws, better policing and more courts will not make our country function properly. Christians and faith communities have a particular role in enabling moral formation.

We should help to form moral people, not promote moralism:

Thinkers throughout the ages have agreed: the biggest enemy of morality is moralism. Moralism is when people make their own lists of what is right and good.

Nationalism, for example, is when nations become so blinded by ideals about nation, race, power and glory that they create a false image of what moral goodness and a decent life entails. In addition, an image of God is formed in which God becomes the “caretaker” of a self-created decency. You can only be reckoned as “someone” if you comply with the national norm for being, and not for expressing your own beliefs and personality. Any person who does not fit in with the nation’s morality is estranged. *“I am, because I belong to my people.”*

Materialism has come to take the place of nationalism. Under the trance of ideals about money, possessions, glory and power, the media and especially the mighty advertising industry create an image of moral decency. With this comes a suitable image of God: a god who blesses people with abundance and possessions. You are accepted and have a good self-image when you own the right things: *“I am, because I own.”* In this way, we become enslaved to life crippling laws, conventions and feelings of guilt. People think: *“If I’m not rich, I am nothing!”* We conform and wear masks. We continually desire more belongings. We will do anything as long as we can become richer.

In contrast, it is our task to form people who feel good about themselves, even if they are not rich and famous. They should like their own personalities and therefore like other people, too. They should have a character that does not want to deceive other people.

We should deal with moral formation in a spirit of gladness

There is great concern about the moral education of our country’s people. Do they hear about “right and wrong” only in terms of threats, corporal punishment, prison or a dismissal from work? How many people ever see a role model worthy of imitation in their home, at school, work or in parliament, so that they can find joy in the imitation of role models?

After all, the Bible teaches us:

To know what is right and wrong and what is good and bad brings a person joy. That is part of your redemption.

The rabbis who made the children learn the teachings of the Lord by heart, knew and lived it themselves. They apparently gave the children honey to strengthen the positive association.

Sabbath celebrations and legal readings were cheerful events accompanied by a meal, where everyone was

welcome. The ten commandments were regarded as a part of a believer's freedom: God had led them out of slavery. And in the Psalms, it is sung that those who have a lamp for their feet and a light for their journey are happy (Psalm 119).

Rabbi Jesus also began his teachings with such "happiness teachings". In a time of moralism and formulaic religion, Jesus points out the deeper meaning of God's will.

According to Jesus, it is not just about being independent of God's laws, but about being dependent on God himself (Matthew 5:3). Dependence on a law can change your exterior, but dependence on God changes your inner being, your heart.

It is about more than just your acts (doing), it is about your soul (being). It is about more than a list of right and wrong; it is about wisdom that can discern between good and evil. It is about more than a lamp that you carry around on your person; rather about the eye that looks out from inside your heart.

When your heart is brim-full of all kinds of ideals, treasures, idols, obligations and cares, your inner eye flickers around. But you will be happy when you are so dependent on God that simplicity can come to your heart (Matthew 6:22-23). Then you can see God in the ordinary (Matthew 5:8) and not have to ramble after possessions for security (Matthew 6:25-34).

Christians' double task of fighting corruption

Just like our government, our citizens would rather talk about corruption than actively doing anything about it. Paying a bribe is far cheaper and easier than going to court to plead for justice. However, if we all are willing to bear a little inconvenience, we can drastically lessen corruption.

Uncover corruption

It's not always easy to do something. To be a whistle blower in a government service department, for instance, is a great risk. There are many examples of whistle blowers who lose their jobs, have to suffer injustice or are even murdered. But however difficult and dangerous it may be, corruption can only be conquered through our acts of self-sacrifice.

The biggest problem in our world is that good people do nothing about evil!

In a study by Price Waterhouse Coopers, it was found that while only 15 % of economical crimes are discovered by risk management systems, 23% become known after informal tips about them (*Beeld*, 14 August 2013). Our responsibility as employees and citizens to uncover corruption is greatly significant. It cannot be won without courage.

However, the exposition of corruption is not just our task as responsible citizens. It is part of our life through faith. God asks for justice and obedience. Jesus asks that we as his followers have courage. We have to look past our own interests. We have to do something about corruption, even if the cost is the loss of popularity or promotion.

Because it can be so dangerous and people do not have the necessary knowledge, it is best to create and support institutions that fight corruption together. There are numbers that can be phoned anonymously and ways to protect oneself against revenge.

Churches can also take hands to fight the evil of corruption together. An organisation that is recognised worldwide, *Exposed*, is headed up by Rev. Dion Foster, a South African minister of the Methodist Church.

Help people to have a healthy self-image and values

To merely uncover corruption by talking or complaining about it or reporting it, is not enough. That is like chopping

off the leaves of a fast-growing toxic plant but doing nothing about the root system, which sends up new shoots in various places.

Exposed therefore also warns against our economic culture's ruthless craving for power and profit. We should combat the greed that drive people to be a "someone" with an alternative style of living. The falseness of "*I am, because I own*" or "*I will be someone, if I own a lot*" should be denounced. That can only be when we as Christians live the motto: "*I am, because the Lord loves me!*"

If rich people are better accepted than poor people in the churches, we promote the spirit of greed in our country. If we show more admiration in the church for riches than for the fruits of the Spirit such as kindness, self-control and support, we promote the climate for corruption to thrive.

Churches and Christians themselves should live as the Lord asks. God asks that we should be happy with what we have and not continually wish for more and more. To give brings more joy than to receive, Jesus said (Acts 20:35). We know that God's Spirit frees us from selfishness. In our services, prayer groups, small groups and own devotions, the Spirit wants to free us from selfishness, free to serve others.

André van Niekerk