



When Marian and I went to live in Turkey, Marian got a residency permit straight away. I, however, entered the country on a three-month tourist visa and my employer failed to obtain a residency permit for me. So, once our first three months were up, Marian and I took the train from Istanbul to Thessalonica in Greece, stayed for the weekend and then came back to Istanbul on the train.

When we got to Turkish passport control Marian was fine because she had a residency permit. I was taken off the train, however, and led into a small office. In the office the immigration official opened the drawer of his desk and said, 'You are working illegally in my country and I don't earn much money.' I looked inside the drawer to see a small collection of foreign banknotes. I contributed a £10 note to the collection, he snapped the drawer shut and with a flourish stamped my passport.

I worked in Turkey and in the Middle East on and off for a few years. Petty corruption became something I got used to and it offers a rich source of anecdotes for later in life, although actually, some of the corruption I came across in the course of my work was not so petty.

Working in foreign countries also opened my eyes to how things worked in my own country. British people sometimes think of corruption as something that happens in foreign countries and I certainly wouldn't recommend trying to bribe your way through immigration control at Manchester Airport. But corruption does exist in our country. We have become used to it and treat it as part of the normal way of doing things. We barely notice it and yet we all live with its consequences. The 2008 crash, for example, was built partly on corruption, on people doing the wrong thing because it would profit them personally.

Doing the wrong thing in order to benefit personally. Doing something because it suits us personally; avoiding our responsibility rather than doing

what we are supposed to do. Thinking about it that way, many of us have been guilty of corruption at some point in our lives. How do we avoid being corrupt? How do we respond when we encounter corruption?

Felix kept Paul in prison to do a favour to his opponents and kept meeting him in order to encourage Paul and his followers to pay him a bribe to release him. That was not what he was supposed to do. It was his job to govern a province and dispense justice.

The church didn't offer to bribe Felix. There was no £10 note in the drawer for Felix. Paul sat it out in prison. As usual, Paul trusted in God and relied on the Holy Spirit to determine what would happen next. Just because corruption seems to be the way things are done, doesn't mean that is the way the church should do things.

What would it have taken for Felix to be an honest governor? Well, we know the words that he didn't like to hear. They were 'justice', 'self-control' and 'the coming judgement'. Felix sent Paul away when he started talking about these things.

And these are the very things we should be thinking about when we are tempted to do the wrong thing for our personal convenience; even when we see other people around us acting corruptly. We ask ourselves what justice demands. We ask ourselves in what way we are called to exercise self-control in a given situation. And we ask ourselves how this will look, not to our contemporaries in the moment, but at the time of the coming judgement. Felix couldn't face these questions. But, we, by the grace of God, can.

In other words, in moments of crisis and when we have to make important decisions about which road to take, we hold onto the thought expressed in Micah 6:8

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?