

April 2012

Dear Brethren:

Once again, the brethren here in Mindanao, Philippines, are privileged to convey our love and warm greetings to all of you through this *Monthly Letter*. We are very thankful to our Almighty God for calling us and opening our minds to understand His words in the Holy Bible through His end-time servants.

During the time of Christ, the study of the Bible flourished. Boys began their education with the study of what we call the Old Testament. Those who continued their schooling added the study of various commentaries. In time, groups of scholars emerged, led by favorites like Gamaliel, Shemai and Hillel. Biblical knowledge filled their schools of learning.

In Luke 11:52, Christ addressed a group of those scholars. He said, "Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge" (*New King James Version* throughout). Now the knowledge itself was there. But the key to understanding and using it had been replaced by another agent—a leavening agent.

Christ warned His disciples about this leaven. And through His warning to them, He also warns us: "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Luke 12:1). When knowledge flourishes, the leaven of hypocrisy can find a fertile environment. As we approach the Days of Unleavened Bread this year, are we on guard against this leaven of hypocrisy?

No one likes hypocrisy in others. No one wants to be a hypocrite himself. The hypocrite professes to believe in a set of values, principles or laws. But he shows by his words or actions that it is only a facade.

Unfortunately, it is very easy to fall into the trap of hypocrisy. For example, when we read in Proverbs 18:8 that, "the words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, and they go down into the inmost body," we can see it is wrong to gossip. Yet, every time we tune our television into our favorite program of Mr. Boy Abunda, *The Buzz*, we find ourselves listening to the latest scoop about who is doing what, where they are doing it and why! Worse yet, before we realize it, we are asking for more details! Later we come to see that we have been a hypocrite. We knew that it was wrong to gossip. Proverbs 11:9 tells us that "the hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor," but it is hard to put the brakes on bad habits, isn't it?

We all collect habits. We normally try to eliminate the bad ones. But because habits are habits, they carry momentum of their own. It is not that we do not want to live by the instruction of the Bible. We certainly do not mean to be hypocritical, but if the habit continues to rule us, rather than the beliefs we profess, then we are not really convicted. And we allow the leaven of hypocrisy to grow inside us.

When I was in high school, one of our popular pastimes was the daily "cut-down" game. The objective was to belittle your adversary. Your effort was cancelled if the other person replied with an even more insulting put down. The competition was both fierce and brutal.

But high school is not the only battlefield for this kind of "game." We can fall into the habit of demeaning each other anytime in life. And although the sword of the tongue may be wielded with more finesse in adulthood, the words can be just as painful.

In the book of James we are told:

But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh (James 3:8–12).

The point? The way we speak to each other is important. If we habitually put others down, we are making a pretense of obedience to God. It does not matter whether we have developed the habit in high school, from our family or from our peers at work. What is important is that we have professed to believe God and follow His instruction in everything. But our words shout our hypocrisy. Again, wrong habits carry a momentum that is hard to stop. But if we allow them to drive our lives, we are simply living a lie!

There is another way hypocrisy infects us. We crave the respect of others. Nobody wants to be regarded as foolish, clumsy or inept. For after food, clothing and shelter, our greatest need may be for the approval of others. Look at the account of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. They watched as other people sold land or houses to provide for the needs of the brethren. But for them, there was a conflict of interest. They wanted to hear other people whisper, "Look at those generous people." But their generosity was not sincere. What they really wanted was the praise of men. We might scoff at their hypocrisy. Yet we can all too easily fall into the same trap.

We can be generous with both our time and money. But it takes great self-control to suppress the urge to let everyone know just how much we have helped a brother in the church,

or how much we have tithed and donated in offerings through the years. But we know this is wrong. Christ said, "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:1).

We particularly want the important, or wealthy, or powerful to think highly of us. James tells us:

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? . . . But you have dishonored the poor man. . . . If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well (James 2:1–8).

Our desires to be respected by those we admire trap us. In trying to impress some, we put others down. And in so doing, we essentially turn our backs on our beliefs.

James followed up the example he gave:

But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy (James 3:14–17).

Christ also exposed the vanity of those religious leaders when He said:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe 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. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! (Matthew 23:23–24)

These men were proud of their adherence to the most detailed mechanics of tithing—down to the tiniest seed. Yet they missed the most fundamental lessons God was teaching through those laws. God's tithing laws teach justice by applying the same rule to everyone. As fastidious keepers of the law, they merely paid lip service to justice. It certainly was not justice that they sought when Christ was dragged before the Sanhedrin. "Now the

chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death" (Matthew 26:59). Their pride blinded them to their hypocrisy.

This is what Christ meant when He asked them:

And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? . . . Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye (Matthew 7:3, 5).

As we do our de-leavening, does our pride blind us from seeing our own hypocrisy?

Hypocrisy is hollow inside—and rotten. It devours our integrity—it poisons relationships, and it destroys our ability to serve as credible teachers.

In the book of Job we read, "And the hope of the hypocrite shall perish . . . . He leans on his house, but it does not stand" (Job 8:13, 15).

If we make the decision to really live the way of God, we can decide to do this with a conviction and sincerity that goes to the core of our beings. This is the attitude Paul was talking about when he said, "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:8). With wholehearted conviction. Conviction to live by God's ways even though that means we have to change. And even though that means there will be a battle to fight for the rest of our lives.

Paul wrote about his own personal struggle in the book of Romans. He said, "For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Romans 7:22–23). He was convicted of the need to obey God. And he was aware of the pulls of the flesh that could turn him into a hypocrite if he gave in to them. There was no pretense with Paul.

Overcoming our flesh—overcoming hypocrisy—is a lifelong challenge. But if we are truly seeking God's way, it is a challenge we must face.

Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious (1 Peter 2:1–3).

The Days of Unleavened Bread were instituted to remind us to search out spiritual leaven in ourselves—of which hypocrisy is a major type. It is an insidious agent that can

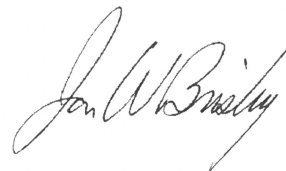
permeate one's character. And when it does, it hurts us. It sears the conscience and blinds us to what we really are. It destroys our credibility in teaching our neighbors, brethren and even our children.

As we enter the Days of Unleavened Bread, let us put out the leaven of hypocrisy and become unleavened—with sincerity and truth.

Your brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Mario Roque".

Mario Roque

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jon W. Brisby".

Jon W. Brisby