

July 2013

Dear Brethren:

Once again, very warm greetings from us here in far Bukidnon, Philippine Islands. May the grace and peace from God abound with you always.

First, I thank our Father in heaven, through Jesus Christ, for all of you, and constantly I remember you in my prayers that you stay healthy, prospering physically and spiritually. It is my aim always to impart to you some spiritual gifts to make you strong and that you and I may be mutually encouraged by one another's faith.

Dearly beloved of God, the theme of my message to you on this occasion is: "The Character Traits That a True Christian Must Possess." I say *true* Christians because in the world today there are many kinds of Christians. There are many nominal Christians, or in simple words, Christians in name only. According to the Apostle Paul in Romans 1:21–25:

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator. . . .

They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy (vv. 29–31, *New International Version* throughout).

Paul here in the foregoing verses has enumerated the bad characteristics of nominal Christians. What then are the good virtues of true Christians?

According to the Apostle Paul, the good character traits or virtues that real Christians should possess are: First and foremost, love, followed by courage or fortitude, then temperance, then justice or fairness, and also prudence, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

1) *Courage or Fortitude*: This consists of a habitual ability to suffer hardships or pain. We know what it means to be a courageous army soldier. As soldiers of Christ, we need to be more courageous like Jesus and the apostles of God, who risked their lives for the faith. Moses, when he was old and full of years, was told by God to choose Joshua to succeed him and to possess the Promised Land:

Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the presence of all Israel, "Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the Lord swore to their ancestors to give them, and you must divide it among them as their inheritance" (Deuteronomy 31:7).

2) *Temperance*: Temperance is defined as moderation in all good things and abstinence from all bad and harmful things. Overeating and overdrinking are obvious examples of intemperance that often result in sickness and disability. Many people today are overweight or obese because of overeating and overindulgence of appetite, which is the cause of many diseases like high blood pressure, heart trouble, diabetes and others. As a model, we have our beloved ministers who visit us here in the Philippines and teach us by their example this virtue of temperance.

As true Christians we must also avoid tobacco or smoking. Tobacco is poisonous, malignant, addictive and the cause of premature deaths. Secondhand smoke is also poisonous even to nonsmokers. In 1 Corinthians 6:18–19, Paul tells us to:

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, [which] is in you, [which] you have received from God? . . .

According to the Apostle Paul, intemperance is a sin against God, because if we abuse our bodies with things like drugs, smoking, overeating and drunkenness, we destroy our bodies which are temples of the Holy Spirit.

3) *Justice*: Justice is that virtue which directs a man to treat his neighbor fairly and to render to him what is due. It also consists of being law-abiding and acting for the common good or welfare of one's church or society. The liar, the thief, the slanderer, the perjurer, the businessman who charges too much and the worker who loafes on the job are all unjust men.

He has shown you, o mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8).

4) *Prudence*: Proverbs 14:8: "The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways. . . ." The prudent man is one who has the habit of being careful about the decisions he makes in the field of action. He seeks advice or takes counsel primarily from the Word of God or from God's ministers. He acts only after he has made a thoughtful judgment instead of acting rashly or impulsively. The Apostle Paul in Galatians 5:22–23 mentions other character traits of the true Christian. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

5) *Love*: Among the many character traits enumerated by Paul, first and foremost is LOVE. But what is this thing called love? Most of us, when we hear the word love, think immediately of the way of a man with a maid (Proverbs 30:19). This romantic love is not only the staple of great dramas, movies, and romantic fiction, it is also one of the basic expressions of weddings—the permanent bond between two people. But this is only one of the many forms of love. There is not only the love of David for Bathsheba, there is also the love between David and Jonathan, the love between Jesus and the disciples and the love between people who belong to a religious fellowship. The English language uses the same word, "love," for so many different kinds of relationships.

The Greeks had not one word for it, but three: *philia*, *eros* and *agape*.

*Philia*: the love between members of a family—between parents and children. Also the friendships between person and person. The Jonathan and David kind of love is also used under this word, *philia*.

*Eros*: the desirous, longing kind of love that is satisfied only by the possession of the object of that love. For us, it normally signifies the sexual love between a man and a woman. The word is not used in the New Testament.

*Agape*: religious love or godly love. It is the love of God enjoined in the Bible, following the pattern of God's redemptive love for man. The Holy Scriptures enjoin us to love God as He loved us. There is a song which says, "The love of God is greater far, than tongue or pen can ever tell. It goes beyond the highest star and reaches to the lowest hell." In John 3:16 we read: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

The apostle to the gentiles, Paul, gives us immortal words regarding the kind of godly love He wants us to have as true Christians. This is found in 1 Corinthians chapter 13.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain

nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is [imperfect] disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a [poor] reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is *love* [emphasis mine].

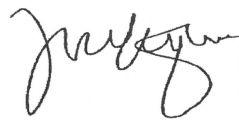
Dearly beloved brethren, beloved of God, let us emulate Jesus our Savior. He has demonstrated by His life and death His great love for us as His people. When the fullness of the time had come and Jesus was soon to offer His life as a ransom for many, He gathered His twelve disciples just before the Passover Feast:

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end [He now showed them the full extent of His love.] (John 13:1).

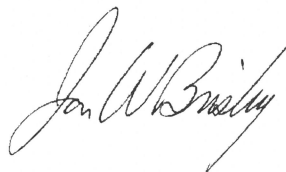
In John chapter 17, Jesus' longest recorded prayer summed up His plans for His disciples and friends gathered around Him. He prayed for all the disciples and all the faithful believers. John 17:20–21 says, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you . . . ."

Jesus' last words and command are found in John 15:12: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you."

Your Brother in Christ,



Mario Y. Roque



Jon W. Brisby