

August 2010

Dearly beloved Brethren:

Greetings from Mindanao, Philippines. May you be in the best of health and prospering physically and spiritually.

As I am writing this letter, we here in the Philippines have just experienced the very first automated presidential election. Of course Filipinos overwhelmingly voted for Benigno Aquino III, believing in his promises during the campaign period that he can solve the problems of poverty, injustice, corruption in the government, etc. His campaign for the presidency, indeed the very promise of his improbable candidacy, was the promise of change. Of course we want a change, but that change will never come from any political leaders during this time. As Mr. Jon Brisby wrote in his *Announcement Letter* of December 2008, in the fifth paragraph, "God's appointed man won the election! God gave him the victory as part of His perfect plan in these last days . . . But God has made it plain that this world will only get worse and worse—not better." God's people are looking forward to a real change of government when our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ comes, pictured by our celebration of God's fall festival we are looking forward to a few weeks from now.

Brethren, the burden of my letter to you is found in the book of James 3:5–6.

Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.

There are two directions that talking about others can take. One is carrying tales to those in authority, and the other is just plain gossip with anybody and everybody. The Bible says, "You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people" (Leviticus 19:16). This principle is repeated many times in the old and new testaments.

Did you ever have your reputation tainted or destroyed by someone passing along stories and anonymous opinions, all intended to destroy your credibility, of course? When someone is robbed of money or physical things that they have worked for, they feel violated, diminished and taken advantage of. But physical things can be replaced.

Our elected president, Benigno Aquino III, during the campaign period was accused of past land-grabbing and even mental disorder. Before a huge audience, he said, "I have spent my whole life building my reputation and integrity, and they are trying to take it away from me in a week." A ruined reputation is almost impossible to overcome. Even if the allegations are later proved untrue, there is always a taint, a suspicion about one's integrity in the mind of those involved. Moreover, the accused will distrust the talebearer and those who acted on the information.

In God's church, carrying tales to others which denigrate your delegated local leaders is tantamount to despising Jesus Christ. In Mr. Jon Brisby's *Monthly Letter* of June 2007, he said: "If you have any respect for my own integrity, if you feel I have proved by my own personal fruits that I am a sincere and legitimate representative of Jesus Christ, then please also give the benefit of the doubt [respect] to those men I have delegated to help me in this work. Jesus Christ said, 'He that heareth you [those delegated helpers] heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me' (Luke 10:16). The same applies to those helpers at lower levels who act with the authority of the Pastor and Director."

But we are converted people, some will say. Surely people in the church of God would not do something like that. On the other hand, we all went to the same "school" of this world. And in spite of our effort to love our neighbor as ourselves, we still have much of the mind of this world influenced by Satan. Anytime we talk to someone about someone else we need to question our motives very carefully.

In the early 1940s during the Japanese occupation here in the Philippines, the Japanese adopted an informer system so that they could ferret out dissent. Some Filipinos, to ingratiate themselves with the cruel Japanese soldiers, informed on their brother Filipinos. Many of those so denounced were put in prison or killed. Christ prophesied of a similar future time.

Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death (Matthew 10:21).

If the people are in the habit of using the informer system in a time of peace, it will only be natural for them to act likewise when a time of trouble comes, with potentially disastrous results.

A friend of mine, Francisco Paraguas, a veteran of World War II, once told me: "The most terrible thing was not what the Japanese did to the Philippines during the occupation, but what the Filipinos did to one another by informing on others so as to gain advantage and favor with the Japanese."

The carnal mind always seeks its own way, its own aggrandizement. It wants to be right. Self-justification is one way to achieve that goal. Accusation is another. Both help to shield our own mistakes. The carnal mind wants to be exalted. It will distort facts or twist statements to preserve its own presumed integrity.

But God commands, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour" (Exodus 20:16). Do you grasp the depth of this commandment? Bearing false witness against someone does not only involve lying, but also accusing, gossiping and spreading rumors.

If you are truly a Christian, you should never take part in any of these activities. You should not accuse others, whether it is to defend yourself, to cover your mistakes or merely to make yourself look good in the eyes of others. In other words, the ninth commandment forbids lies, accusation, gossip and spreading rumors. That is what bearing false witness is.

As true Christians, you are to love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39). But how can you love your neighbor if you accuse him or gossip about him? How can you love him if you have a part in breaking up his family or his home or in making him lose his friends?

Satan wants you to bear false witness. He would like to cause division between you and your brethren. He would like to destroy your home, and he would do anything to divide or destroy the church.

When you gossip, you bear false witness against your neighbor, but God says, "Thou shalt not bear false witness . . . Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Romans 13:9).

Remember, gossip's root cause may be self-justification, jealousy, and a spirit of vengeance or simply vanity. But whatever the cause, gossip is sin. It breaks the ninth commandment. God hates gossip.

These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren (Proverbs 6:16–19).

Practically every one of the seven things mentioned in these verses has something to do with lying, gossiping, spreading rumors and sowing discord among the brethren.

Again, in Leviticus 19:16–18, God told His people:

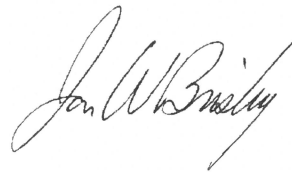
Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbor: I am the LORD. Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him. Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the LORD.

As God's people, His church, it is high time we wake up and obey His commandments seriously and from the heart.

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