

A House Made Not With Hands

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But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture— “I believe, and so I spoke”—we also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgivings, to the glory of God.

So, we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for we know that what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal. For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.¹



This reading from Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians set me to thinking about the vast fraternal system we called *Freemasonry*: its tenants and superstructure of degrees and orders; the various tools for the craftsmen; the sublime truths and inculcated lessons; and the directional signs on the highway of life wherein man learns to find a series of interpretations, to have his faculties awakened to the vista of sight, sound and ideas to which he can constantly return for new meanings and fresh understanding.

In the Old Testament, men built Tabernacles and shrines for a place for God to dwell with the people. But, in those times, people met together and worshiped God outside under the open sky; only the priests were allowed within the Tabernacle, which was later called a Temple. In the New Testament’s Acts² the Lord spoke to the Prophet, “Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me?” Later in Acts,³ Paul tells us in the sermon at Mar Hill that God does not dwell in a building; He dwells in our hearts; we are His Temples.

¹ 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1, New American Standard Bible

² Acts 7:48-51, New American Standard Bible

³ Act 17:24-25, New American Standard Bible

From the Symbolic Lodge we learn the **Master Mason** is an overseer of the work and is taught many moral lessons and prepared for the life to come. BUT . . . The *Temple of Life* is not yet complete. What the new Master Mason has is a "Lost Word" and an insatiable thirst for Light--to improve his mind: to be proficient in the Ancient Landmarks, jurisprudence, philosophies, symbolism, ritual, history, etiquettes, organizations, and structures; to get a liberal education; and increase his knowledge and understanding in Freemasonry. His purpose is to build a Temple not made of hands in his heart worthy of God.

The journey for Light is an individual effort and is the most important ingredient in Freemasonry's stature in the community -- the individual Master Mason bears the burden for his own Masonic education. It is a heavy burden to bear. Freemasonry is a progressive science; a system of ethics wherein moral precepts are taught by lessons based on the allegorical use of the operative craftsman's tools. Symbolic Freemasonry prepares the candidate in the use of symbolic stone for that Spiritual Temple. Capitular and Cryptic Freemasonry instructs the candidate in the allegorical use of additional operative tools of the craftsman. Finally, Chivalric Freemasonry instructs the candidate in the allegorical use of the weapons and the discharge of the duties of knighthood whereby the Moral Temple, built and restored in Symbolic, Capitular and Cryptic Freemasonry, can be defended and beautified by the precepts of Christianity.

A study commissioned by the Subcommittee on Strategic Planning for the Supreme Council, 33°, Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite for the Southern Jurisdiction of the United States, reported that:⁴

"Masonry in general is in the strange position of offering many of the things which society most needs and desires, and yet it is seen as irrelevant by society."

"While we are still respected in many quarters, it is the same kind of respect offered to aging professors of abstract mathematics or astrophysics—a respect combined with a feeling that we are venerable but irrelevant."

People continue to question "Is Freemasonry irrelevant?" In my opinion Freemasonry is relevant, but today's Mason needs to look beyond the ritual to expand his vision. The Holy Scriptures tell us that faith without action is dead; so, it is with Masonry, theory is fine but Masonry in practice is in its finest hour.

⁴ *Report to the Biennial Session 1997*, Subcommittee on Strategic Planning, Supreme Council for the Southern Jurisdiction, Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry

In his book *The Search for Leadership*, Brother Allen Roberts writes “*there can be no dedication without education.*”⁵ Every one of us has knelt at a Sacred Alter in some Masonic Lodge and upon being brought to Light looked down two lines of men, a kind of tunnel, toward the Master in the East. Many of our Brethren continue to suffer from tunnel vision and cannot see beyond the ritual. While Brother Roberts believed that education begins with the ritual, he also believed merely parroting the ritual does not educate a man in the teachings of Freemasonry or the meaning of its symbols. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, but a deeper study of the surface of things expands the intellect and leads man toward an understanding of what is true.

Masonry is not merely speculative, nor is it merely theoretical, rather it is experimental. Today’s global environment has more pronounced the experimental nature of Freemasonry; not sentimental, but practical. Each of us pledged to look beyond the surface of things, to seek, and search out the hidden secrets of nature and science. Today’s world requires masonic self-renunciation and self-control. The Master Mason must wear a stern face towards men’s vices, require a personal reformation of character, and strengthen personal control over many of life’s pursuits and fancied pleasures.

Remember the Fellowcraft Degree *Staircase Lecture* and the *Three-Five-Seven* steps the candidate follows as he rises the staircase? “And they went up to the winding stairs into the middle chamber.”⁶ There was a winding staircase in Solomon’s Temple, but the scriptures are silent as to how many steps there are leading to the middle chamber. The stairs are a representation of life, not the physical but the mental and spiritual life wherein man learns to have his faculties awakened to the vista of sight, sound and ideas to which he can constantly return for new meanings and fresh understanding.

Three signifies the Deity, the three Great Lights (Bible, Square and Compasses), and the three stationed officers of the lodge (Worshipful Master, Senior and Junior Warden) who symbolizes the tenets of the Level, Square, and Plumb. *Five* refers to the orders of architecture (Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian and Composite), the human senses (Hearing, Seeing, Feeling, Smelling, and Tasting), and Geometry, the fifth science. And *seven* refers to liberal arts and sciences (Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic, Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy).

Freemasonry has been described as a “system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.” It follows that, the Fellowcraft Degree is wholly symbolic to aid the Mason’s journey for Masonic Light, to increase his knowledge and understanding, and to help him rise to the state of a Perfect Ashlar for his Temple not made with hands, worthy of God.

⁵ *Masonic Lifeline: Leadership*, Roberts, Allen E., Anchor Communications, 1992, p. 10

⁶ 1 Kings 6:8, New American Standard Bible

In the Scottish Rite's 9th, 10th and 11th Degrees, the Elects (the story of the Fellowcrafts after the discovery of the murder of Grand Master Hiram Abif in the Second Section of the Third Degree) attain a degree of Masonic virtue; they attained a sense of humanity. Master Masons have the duty to be forward-thinking men of strong moral and ethical quality, to weigh their actions between their own convictions, cultivate their own character, and serve others. The Elu lessons should be directional milestones for the Master Mason's lifetime journey on the highway of life: purity of Honor, Integrity and Duty.

*"To make honor and duty the steady beacon-lights that shall guide your life-vessel over the stormy seas of time; to do that which it is right to do, not because it will ensure you success, or bring with it a reward, or gain the applause of men, or be "the best policy," more prudent or more advisable; but because it is right, and therefore ought to be done; to war incessantly against error, intolerance, ignorance, and vice, and yet to pity those who err, to be tolerant even of intolerance, to teach the ignorant, and to labor to reclaim the vicious—these are some of the duties of a Mason."*⁷

Our Ancient Brethren were great thinkers; they challenged establishments, whether political, theological or philosophical. They were the Elu of their time. Fraters of today should be men of action, the Elu of the 21st Century. Today's global environment whether political, theological or philosophical, Fraters cannot afford to lay down their working tools, for a Mason's work is never done--men of action are still needed.

Throughout history, Masons have devoted themselves to ethical, educational, fraternal, patriotic, and humanitarian concerns. What better way to praise the merits of the Craft than to guide Mason Pilgrims in their journey for Masonic Light. Modern speculative Freemasonry began in 1717. The liberal arts and sciences come to us from the medieval period and Masons have been adding to that knowledge base since. While to our ancient brethren aimed at a blending of all knowledge, today's Masons can aid by applying the seven liberal arts and sciences in a special and appropriate metaphor for a life of self-improvement and mental growth and by using the trowel to spread the spiritual cement that unites Freemasonry into many "Temples of living stones" who can best work and best agree.



⁷ *Morals and Dogma*, Albert Pike, The Supreme Council, 33^o, S.J., USA, 1962, p. 219

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