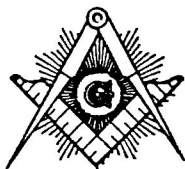


What Is
FREEMASONRY?



**GRAND LODGE
OF
ALABAMA**

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Preface

Volumes have been written on this subject, and many men have spent lifetimes studying Masonry. In this booklet we wish to relate some facts which will be informative to non-Masons and to the members of a Mason's family; for they are interested in whatever he does, but cannot enter the Lodge with him. In particular we wish to correct some common misconceptions of Freemasonry.

MASONIC EDUCATION COMMITTEE

NOT A SECRET SOCIETY

First, Masonry is not a secret society. Its members do not hide the fact of membership. Its Temples or Lodges are well known to the public, and most Masonic organizations take pride in the appearance of their buildings, making their identity known to all by the Square and Compass emblem on the outside. Throughout the centuries of its existence, Masonry has taken pride in proclaiming itself to the world. The ancient Masons who built the old Cathedrals of Europe put their Masonic Marks upon the stones of those edifices. The modern Mason proudly wears Masonic emblems, letting the world know that he is a member of the Ancient and Honorable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons.

In the past two centuries some of the brightest stars in the firmament of history were members of our Fraternity, and the story of our great American Republic was written largely by patriots who were members of the Craft.

George Washington was the first President and the first of fifteen Masons to serve in that high office. Thirty-one of the fifty-six men who signed the Declaration of Independence; twenty-three of the

thirty-nine signers of the Constitution; more than thirty-three of the Justices of the Supreme Court; all these and many others comprise the Masonic Roll of Honor. Lafayette and James Monroe both visited Washingtons Mother-Lodge at Fredericksburg, Virginia; and this Lodge furnished five other men who became Generals in the Army with Washington.

The Fraternity has many great men in its membership today. Where can one turn in the pages of history and find more dedicated patriots than Douglas MacArthur and J. Edgar Hoover?

General MacArthur said: "Masonry embraces the highest moral laws and will bear the test of any system of ethics or philosophy ever promulgated for the uplift of man. Its requirements are the things that are right, and its restraints are from the things that are wrong. Inculcating doctrines of patriotism and brotherly love, enjoying sentiments of exalted benevolence, encouraging all that is good, kind, and charitable, reprobating all that is cruel and oppressive, its observance will uplift everyone under its influence."

Brother Hoover said upon receiving a distinct Masonic honor: "This is the proudest moment of my 45 years' membership in the Masonic Order."... "This award is made all the more meaningful by the high respect which Freemasonry commands in the minds of all who have felt its wholesome influence and observed its good works."

If this booklet contained nothing else, the words of these two illustrious brethren should convey to the reader the fact that Masonry is good and great.

MASONRY: MORALITY AND A WAY OF LIFE

Second, Masonry has many definitions, all explanatory of its nature. We shall use this — it is a system of morality and a way of life. Based on the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. Don't be misled by this definition into thinking that Masonry is a religion. It is not a religion and does not offer a plan of personal salvation. Therefore, Masonry cannot take the place of the Church. It

never has and never will. Yet, it is true and axiomatic that if a Mason practices the lessons taught him, he will be a better man in all respects — a better church member, a better father, a better husband, a better citizen, and a better neighbor.

It is strange, and yet a commentary on human nature, that Masonry has been accused by some detractors as being atheistic; at the same time others accuse it of being a religion. The first charge evolves from the fact that Masonry teaches religious liberty; will not give preference to any specific religious denomination, and refuses to interfere with a Mason's religious duties. The second charge, that of being a religion is equally ridiculous.

It is true, however, that we often call our buildings "Temples" or "Masonic Temples." It is true that all regular Lodges have altars upon which the Holy Bible is displayed; in countries where the members are not Christians or Jews, the appropriate "Book of the Law" is displayed. It is also a fact that Masonic meetings are always opened and closed with prayer. However, Masonry is not a religion, and any member who states otherwise is mistaken. The presence of a Bible in the courtroom or the offering of prayer at any public gathering does not make churches of those places. There is only one religious test for a man to become a Mason — he must believe in a Supreme Being.

LIVING A CERTAIN KIND OF LIFE

Some critics say that the Masonic Lodge should be open to all if it is so beneficial to mankind. We reply by saying that all of the great lessons of Truth and Morality, upon which Masonry is founded, are to be found within the pages of Holy Writ. There are actually very few secrets in Masonry, and they allude to the ritual of initiation and the modes of recognition. The mere possession of such secrets by the non-Mason would not make him a Mason or a better person, for there is no magic in Freemasonry; in order for anyone to be a true Mason, he must live as such.

There are several Masonic Ceremonies which are usually open to the public, and they reveal much of Freemasonry. The "Burial Service" and "Installation of Officers" tell the non-Mason much of what the

Fraternity teaches. At times there are other public ceremonies, such as "laying Foundation Stones of Public Structures," which are impressive and instructive. So, if the non-Mason wishes to learn the principles of Masonry, let him study the eternal truths of the Holy Bible and attend those public ceremonies open to all.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO CHARITY AND EDUCATION

Another way to inform you of the meaning of Masonry is to tell you something of its benevolences, because no worthy organization can long exist unless it does something for others. Masons are builders of society and they must be at work in order to justify their existence.

One noted Masonic Authority said that the Masonic Fraternity, including all of its affiliated bodies, has "contributed more time, money, and effort to the relief of the poor and distressed than any group of men in the history of mankind." Each Masonic Body, whether local, regional, or national is predicated on the fact that its members must first be Master Masons. It is estimated that the Masonic Fraternity, as a whole, contributes over \$1,000,000.00 per day at the present time.

The low dues in a local Lodge do not permit it to engage in much charity, but it contributes it's part to the Grand Lodge which dispenses benevolences.

The York Rite of Freemasonry through the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States operates an Educational Loan Foundation and an Eye Foundation, with each state operating as a separate division of the national program. The Grand Commandery of Alabama actively participates in both of these programs, and substantial amounts are loaned to worthy students each year on liberal repayment terms.

The Eye Foundation is a charity program and for the benefit of those who need treatment or surgery to improve vision, but lack the funds to pay for such surgery and hospitalization.

The Scottish Rite is contributing large sums of money in benevolent work chiefly in the field of education and the diagnosis and treatment of children suffering with language disorders. The Southern Jurisdiction of the Scottish Rite founded the George Washington University's School of Government with a grant of \$1,000,000.00 to support fellowships for the Master's Degree in Government Service. Each orient in the Southern Jurisdiction has its own Foundation which supports scholarships, fellowships and clinics for childhood language disorders. The Orient of Alabama has its Clinic for Childhood Language Disorders at the University of Montevallo, and also grants scholarships and fellowships from the five Valleys located in Alabama. The Northern Jurisdiction of the Scottish Rite provides scholarships and financial aid to students, with proven ability and financial need being the only tests, moreover, a major emphasis is placed on Schizophrenia Research with some \$2,000,000.00 having been spent on this program.

The Shriners of North America provide one of the greatest Masonic Benevolences. Through the Years the Shrine has built and maintained 19 Crippled Children's Hospitals and 3 Burns Institutes to treat patients with extensive burns. These hospitals are operated at a cost of almost 200 million per year. Here again, the only criteria for admission is: the patient needs medical care and cannot pay for it.

The Grottos of North America have as a principal project the Cerebral Palsy Program and they contribute \$25 thousand per year to this Program. Furthermore, the Grotto owns and operates several Cerebral Palsy centers throughout the country.

There are millions of Masons in the world. They don't all attend Lodge meetings regularly, but every Mason ought to attend Lodge occasionally so that he may be reinspired and re-dedicated to the responsibility of being a Mason. Many members become officers and ritualists in the Lodge. Others become active in the affiliated Bodies, such as the York Rite, the Scottish Rite, the Shrine, and the Grotto. Many Masons join the Order of Eastern Star and the Order of the Amaranth with their wives and participate in

their activities. Many members work with the Order of DeMolay for Boys and the Order of Rainbow for Girls.

A good churchman attends church regularly and lives his religion; and a Mason should live up to the ideals of Masonry. If a Mason pays his dues and helps support the benevolences of the Fraternity — if he wears a Masonic emblem so that the world may know him to be a Mason — and if he practices the principles of Masonry in his daily life — then he will be an active Mason and demonstrate to the world that Freemasonry is good, kind, and charitable.

REQUIREMENTS TO BE A MASON

The requirements for a man to become a Mason are simple but exacting. In general they may be listed as follows:

1. He must make application to the Lodge, for membership is not achieved through formal invitation.
2. He must believe in a Supreme Being and in the immortality of the soul.
3. He must be of good moral character.
4. He must be at least 21 years of age and mentally competent.
5. He must be recommended by two Masons of the Lodge to which he makes application.
6. He must be unanimously elected to membership.
7. He must be willing to assume an obligation to the Fraternity, but will not be asked to swear profane oaths; he will not be asked to assume obligations which are incompatible with his religious or civil duties, and those duties which he owes to his family and his fellowman.

It is the custom of most Lodges, on making a man a Mason, to present him with a lambskin or white apron which is his to wear symbolically throughout life as the badge of a Freemason. He should be proud of this badge, and he should wear it with honor to himself and to the Fraternity. The importance of the Apron may be shown by quoting from the Funeral or

Memorial Service given for a deceased brother in good standing:—“The Lambskin is an emblem of innocence, and is esteemed the peculiar badge of a Mason. When worthily worn it is more honorable than the Order of the Garter, the Golden Fleece, or any other order that could be conferred; and every Mason ought to wear it with equal pleasure to himself and honor to the Fraternity.” Therefore, when the Mason in your family brings his Apron home to show you, remember that he has acquired it through merit and has assumed the great responsibilities which go with it. He hasn't been subjected to horse-play or hazing as in a social club or fraternity, but has had a great experience which should be of everlasting benefit to him—and through him to the members of his family, his friends, and the people he encounters in his daily life.

RESPECTED IN THE FREE WORLD

The Masonic Fraternity, one of the oldest in the world, is respected in the communities of free men as an institution of friendship, morality, and brotherly love. It is significant that wherever Masonry flourishes one finds the greatest ideals of civilization; and wherever Freemasonry is proscribed and persecuted, one finds a people living under a tyrannical dictatorship. History reveals that Masonry is one of the first victims of an absolute and dictatorial power, because Masonic teachings and principles are completely incompatible with injustice, intolerance, superstition, anarchy, and atheism. Masonry advocates enlightenment, morality, compassion and freedom; it is, therefore, the natural enemy of all that is vicious, cruel, and oppressive. Freemasonry is prohibited in all totalitarian and communist countries, but in the “free world” there are more than five million members. To be one of those millions gives one both honor and distinction. Some of the brethren are famous in their respective fields of endeavor, and others are more humble situated; but all are equal within the Lodge, and all good Masons are striving for the same goal, to make this world a better place in which to live.