

Our Masonic Responsibilities

Adapted from a paper presented by Most Worshipful Grand Secretary of South Carolina H. Dwight McAlister in June of 1980. The author of this talk spent over 40 years speaking on the subject of Masonic responsibilities and the importance of living up to those duties and responsibilities that each of us has taken upon ourselves voluntarily as Masons. Ever man who comes into Masonry, comes of his own free will and accord. He is not invited to join the Fraternity. He must knock upon the door for admittance.

Our masonic responsibilities can really be summed up in one word, Practice. We have the responsibility of living our Masonry before the world. Every Master Mason is charged with the practice of Masonic ideals and principles taught at the alter of our lodges. In Masonry we say that it is un-Masonic to solicit members, and it is, if you are speaking of asking someone to join the Fraternity. I submit, however, that we do solicit by the lives we live before the world. I submit also that to influence others to seek admission to our Fraternity by the lives we live is a far better way to get new members than by simply asking men to join. I repeat – every Master Mason should realize and be conscious of his responsibility to live Masonry in his daily life. I will add that recently it has been allowed to use language when speaking with men who we would like to see join the fraternity. Statements such as, “I think you would make a good Mason” are acceptable today. Encouragement is not the same as solicitation, and when coupled with making people aware that we are ourselves Masons can be a useful tool in soliciting by example. In short, we should practice what we preach.

One of the most tragic truths I know, is that Masonry means so little to so many who call themselves Masons. Can you imagine the impact if suddenly every lodge member would become a Mason in deed as well as in word; if suddenly every lodge member would become what he professed to be; if suddenly every lodge member would do what he is obligated to do; if suddenly he should practice what he preaches; if suddenly he should measure up to his Masonic responsibilities.

Let us look at a few of the specific areas of our responsibility as Masons.

1st our Responsibility to the lodge

Every member has a duty and responsibility to the organization to which he belongs. So many receive the three degrees and then forget all about the lodge. They seem to feel that it's somebody else's responsibility to keep the lodge going. For a brother to forget the lodge that gave him his Masonic birth is like a son who would forget his mother that gave him physical birth. Suppose no one attended lodge meetings any more than you do, nor took any more of an active part than you do, nor showed any more interest than you do, what would have happened to your lodge? Would it still be in existence? I quote from the charge given to you in the First Degree, “he is to be obedient to the Worshipful Master and other officers set in authority over him, and is to apply himself closely to the business of Freemasonry, that he may the sooner become skilled therein, both for his own credit and for that of the lodge, and thereby earn advancement as the wages of his labors. He is not to neglect his own necessary avocations for the sake of Freemasonry” Some interpret this to mean that it is all right for anything and everything to interfere with their responsibility to their lodge.

There is a story of a doctor in a small French village who was about to retire. He had been on call day and night; the people could not afford to pay him much, but that had made no difference. He cared for

them as he was able. As the day of his retirement approached, the people wished to make a concrete expression of their gratitude and affection. It was proposed that on a given day (since they had so little money to give) they each bring a pitcher of wine from their own cellars and pour it in a large barrel. The day arrived and all day long the people were seen pouring their offerings into the barrel. The evening came and the barrel was taken to the doctor's residence and presented with inevitable speeches. The presentation over, the people went back to their homes and the doctor was left alone with the memory of their love. He went to the barrel and drew off a bit of wine and went into the house and there sat comfortably by the fire to enjoy it. The first sip was a shock. It tasted like water. He sipped again it was water. He went back to the barrel and drew off some more, thinking that there must have been some mistake. But, no, the barrel was filled with water. He called the mayor, and the mayor called the assemblymen and there were hurried consultations. The truth was revealed. Everyone in town had reasoned: My little pitcher of wine won't be missed. I have so little for myself. The others will take care of it. The little water I substituted will not be noticed.

It is a tragic story. It may never have happened, but it is the kind of thing that can and does happen when people refuse to accept their responsibilities, and when they reason as the Frenchmen did, I have so little for myself, Others will take care of it. This is the attitude of so many Masons concerning the lodge. Oft times it is the dedication and devotion of a few in a lodge of hundreds that keep the lodge alive and active.

The following poem by Alice Bennett illustrates what I am trying to say:

One Talent

I have not voice for singing
 I cannot make a speech
I have no gift for music
 I know I cannot teach
I am no good at leading
 I cannot organize
And anything I write
 Would never win a prize
But at the roll call in the meetings
 I always answer, "Here"
When others are performing
 I lend a listening ear
After the program's over
 I praise its every part
My words are not to flatter
 I mean them from my heart
It seems my only talent
 Is neither big nor rare
Just to listen and encourage
 And to fill a vacant chair
But all the gifted people
 Could not so brightly shine

Were it not for those who use
A talent such as mine

Secondly our responsibility to our country

I quote from the charge given in the Entered Apprentice Degree, "In the State, a Freemason is to behave as a peaceable and dutiful citizen, conforming cheerfully to the government under which he lives."

We can say with the Psalmist, "I have a goodly heritage." We enjoy the greatest freedom of any nation on the face of the earth, but I have the feeling we are fast losing it. Some deliberately, some by complacency, and some by simple default. We must wake up to the dangers that face our nation and do something about them. I subscribe to the words of Daniel Webster who said, "God grants liberty to those who love it and are always ready to defend it." We must let the world know that patriotism and love of freedom and individual liberty are not dead in this country. Those who lived before us were proud of their citizenship. They guarded their heritage. They defended their freedom. They kept the Torch of Liberty burning. They kept the Liberty Bell ringing. They kept the Light of Freedom shining. We should be equally proud of our citizenship, guard our heritage and defend our freedom. We must keep the Liberty Bell ringing, the Torch of Liberty burning, and the Light of Freedom shining.

Thirdly our responsibility to our God

I quote again from the charge given in the Entered Apprentice Degree. "There are three general heads of duty which Freemasons ought always to inculcate, namely: to God, our neighbor, and ourselves; to God in never mentioning His Name but with that reverential awe which a creature ought to bear to his Creator, and in looking upon Him always as the God over all."

Masonry is not a religion, but a Mason is religious, a man who believes in God. He must acknowledge his belief in God before he can be made a Mason. Everything in Masonry has reference to God. It implies God, speaks of God, points and leads to God. There is not a degree, not a symbol, not a lecture, nor a charge but finds its meaning and derives its beauty from God, the Great Architect of the Universe. Every lodge is erected to God and dedicated to Holy Saints and labors in God's name. No initiate enters a lodge without first kneeling and confessing his faith and trust in God. A true Mason is a Godly man.

A Mason is a man who believes in prayer. We are to implore his aid in all our laudable undertakings. We are taught never to begin any great or important undertaking without first invoking the blessings of Deity. One of the greatest privileges God ever gave to mortal man is the privilege of prayer, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." (Matthew 7:7) One of the greatest unused powers in the world today is the power of prayer. Prayer is the key that unlocks the storehouse of God's bounty. One of the greatest tragedies is that men fail to exercise the privilege of prayer, "ye have not, because ye ask not." (James 4:4)

Fourthly our responsibility to our fellowman

Again, we read from the Entered Apprentice Degree charge. "To our neighbor, in acting upon the square, or doing as we would be done by."

The Measure of a Man

– by an anonymous author often offered at funeral services

Not, how did he die? But, how did he live?

Not, what did he gain? But, what did he give?

These are the things that measure the worth of a man as a man, regardless of his birth.

Not, what was his station? But, had he a heart?

And, how did he play his God given part?

Was he ever ready with a word of good cheer, to bring back a smile, to banish a tear?

Not, what was his church?

Nor, what was his creed?

But, had he befriended those really in need?

Not, what did the sketch in the newspaper say?

But, how many were sorry when he passed away?

These are the things that measure the worth of a man as a man, regardless of birth.

Lastly our responsibility to yourself

We read again from the Entered Apprentice Degree Charge. “And to ourselves, in avoiding all intemperance and excesses whereby we may be rendered incapable of following our work or led into behavior unbecoming our laudable profession, and in always keeping within due bounds and free from all guilt.” I believe that it is my duty and your duty to take the life that God has given us and make the very best out of it that’s possible for us to make.

Dorothy R. Jones writes,

Your task, “to build a better world”, God said.

I answered, “how”?

The world is such a large vast place

So complicated now

And I so small and useless am

There’s nothing I can do

But God in all his wisdom said

Just build a better you.

In summation

Some person has imagined a conversation between the devil and an angel. In their story the angel proudly tells the devil that a way had been found to defeat him. When the devil asked how it would be done, the angel told him that God was going to give to men lofty ideals, and challenging principles, to be proclaimed to the world. The devil laughed and told the angel that he could not be defeated that way, for all he would have to do would be to institutionalize the ideals and principles, and it would be only a matter of time until men would forget the ideals and principles as they focused on keeping the institution alive.

Someone explained it this way. First the idea creates the organization, and then the organization chokes the idea.

It is important that we keep the organization of Masonry alive, but we must not forget the ideas and ideals that gave it birth. Our responsibility goes beyond the lodge.

Brother McAlister, in writing this talk, stated that before he became a Mason, he had the idea that Freemasonry was a tight organization, whose obligations did not go beyond the bounds of the lodge. The bounds of the lodge, he took to be its membership, and that Masons were under obligation to practice Masonry with Masons and nothing more.

Then he discovered the real bounds of the lodge.

A lodge is said, symbolically, to extend in length from the east to the west; in the breadth from north to south; in height, from the earth to the highest heavens; in depth, from the surface to the center. A lodge is said to be of these vast dimensions to denote the universality of Masonry, and to teach us that a Mason's charity should be equally extensive. In other words, the lodge is a symbol of the world. Let us never forget the purpose of Freemasonry, and our responsibilities as Masons.