

"FAITH, HOPE, AND CHARITY"

In the Entered Apprentice lecture we learn that the covering of a lodge is a clouded canopy, or starry-decked heavens, where every good Mason hopes at last to arrive. We learn about that spiritual ladder Jacob saw in his vision, from Genesis Chapter 28:

"And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it."

Masonic tradition informs us the three principal rungs are labelled Faith, Hope and Charity. But interestingly, those words do not appear in Genesis, but rather 1 Corinthians Chapter 13:

"And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."

The men who crafted our ritual saw fit to unite these ideas, and they work together well, if separated a bit biblically. Let us expand on these virtues, how they relate to Freemasonry, and how to pursue them in our daily lives.

FAITH

Faith and religion are often confused; religion has been defined as:

"The belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods."

While faith is defined in Hebrews 11:

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

You might say, faith is trusting in something you cannot explicitly prove. You must have faith in God to be a Mason. But how you exercise that faith, the doctrine you follow, the means of expressing it, may rightly be called your religion, and that decision is left to the individual Mason.

Is Masonry a Christian organization? One might assume that since a majority of American Masons are Protestants that Masonry is limited to Christians only. We open the Bible, a sacred book to Jews and Christians alike, on our altar. The ancient landmarks refer to it as the volume of sacred law, while the ritual refers to the Bible. But what if a Muslim joins the lodge? Must we substitute a Koran on the altar? The House of the Temple has copies of the Bible, the Bhagavad-Gita, the Old Testament, the Zend-Avesta, the Sutras and the Quran, to cover "99.9 percent of candidates", as Brent Morris put it. We are not exclusively Christian and Jewish by any conscious act, but simply by demographics.

Besides God, what else are we called to have blind trust in? We have faith that the Worshipful Master will govern in a manner best for the lodge. We have

faith that every new brother will become a true and faithful servant among us, and pray for this very thing during his initiation. Do we have faith in the future of our lodge? At the close of the installation ceremony we hear:

"Finally, my brethren, as this association has been formed and perfected in so much unanimity and concord, in which we greatly rejoice, so may it long continue. May you long enjoy every satisfaction and delight which disinterested friendship can afford. May kindness and brotherly affection distinguish your conduct, as men and Masons. Within your peaceful walls, may your children's children celebrate with joy and gratitude the transactions of this auspicious solemnity. And may the tenets of our profession be transmitted through your Lodge, pure and unimpaired, from generation to generation."

What a wonderful admonition! On installation night we are focused on the coming year. But we are reminded this but an instant in the lifetime of our lodge. Our children's children will read the name of the current Master in the program, much like reading a name on a random tombstone. Only the youngest Mason alive today might be there to remember him. How many 50 or 60 year veterans are active in your lodge? But just as they followed their obligations, were true and faithful to the craft, and preserved their lodge for us, we have an equal obligation to preserve it for future Masons to enjoy.

How do we pursue Faith in our daily lives as Masons? It is easy to get discouraged. We may disapprove of the actions or inactions of the Worshipful Master. We see men initiated, passed, and even raised who just drift away, never to be seen again. We may be concerned about the ritual work and

struggle to fill the parts for a degree. We may worry about money and the state of our temple. But Masonry calls upon us all to have faith, to follow the ancient landmarks, follow our obligations, and let our Masonic story unfold in the way God intended.

HOPE

The lecture tells us that Hope ends in fruition. But what is hope? What do we hope for in Masonry? We hope for a good and productive Masonic year. We hope for a well-attended and well-executed degree; a dinner that brings us together; a lodge picnic with our families; a successful fundraiser, blood drive, or Bring a Friend Night. We hope a new member will stay active, especially if we coached him. Many lodges simply hope that a Junior Deacon will materialize in time for the Annual Communication, and hope they will not have to fold because of a lack of membership, money, or participation. But this is merely wishful thinking, wanting things to turn out right, and in our hearts scared to death that they won't. Yet Hebrews 6 refers to hope as an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast. We must take refuge in the fact that God is with us and guides us.

How do we pursue hope in our daily lives as Masons? How do we turn wishful thinking into unshakable knowledge that things will be alright? We must have faith, in our officers and in God. We say that Masonry is not a religion but tell our candidates that good works are necessary to enter the Celestial Lodge above. Many of us believe that grace alone gets us into heaven, so how do we reconcile this? Perhaps we should consider this phrase not in a literal sense but

in a symbolic one: The rewards for good works is not after we have laid down our working tools; but right here in our lodge. When we perform solid ritual, when we follow the Ancient Landmarks, when we spread the cement of brotherly love and affection, we are erecting that spiritual building here among the brethren of the Lodge, and we are ensuring that it continues long after we are gone.

CHARITY

Masonry has many charities: Shriners Hospitals, Knights Templar Eye Foundation, Cryptic Masons Medical Research Foundation, Royal Arch Research Assistance Philanthropy, Scottish Rite Learning Centers, to name only a few. In the U.S. we contribute 750 million dollars a year, or over 2 million dollars a day, every day. Add the efforts of each blue lodge and that number is actually much higher.

We organize blood drives, adopt city streets, and donate to food banks. Some Grand Lodges have Masonic Homes for our older brothers, wives and widows. When you buy online from Amazon, enter "smile.amazon.com" instead and they will make a donation to the charity of your choice, including many Masonic charities. These are all good charities and deserve our support. They certainly seem convenient. But a donation from an online purchase, from annual dues, or the act of throwing five dollars in a basket: Can we really call this CHARITY? Does it seem to you a little bit sanitized? Antiseptic? Detached? While the cause is worthy, the action is so removed from any real involvement on our part. Do

you see the person who receives the charity? Do you visit your Masonic Home? Are you even aware of the good you are doing, or is just a habit?

How do we pursue charity in our daily lives as Masons? In describing the form of a lodge, we refer to vast dimensions to illustrate how unbounded a Mason's charity should be. Are your habitual and automatic efforts at charity truly unbounded? Do you go home from Lodge with a warm feeling in your heart because you contributed three more dollars? Here is an answer, in a place we don't seem to be looking. For every member of your lodge you see on a regular basis, there are ten who you don't see at all. These Brothers are just as entitled to your friendship and brotherly love as the rest. What do we do for them? What can we do for them? Is it something as simple as yardwork? Do they need something painted or repaired? A wheelchair ramp for their front door? Do they need a call or a visit, just to spend time with them? Our ritual directs us to care for our widows and orphans. Do any of our lodges do anything for their widows anymore? We are not doing nearly enough. Here is an opportunity to stop being detached. Here is an opportunity to stop being complacent. Here is an opportunity to become more unbounded.