

FREEMASONRY DEFINED

Bro. Nations is a Past Grand Master of Missouri and Bro. Elam is a Past Master of Algabil-Freedom Lodge #636, St. Louis, Missouri. Together they authored "Freemasonry Defined" to give a clear and consise overview of the Masonic Fraternity. The picture of Freemasonry painted in this STB should be in the hearts of all Freemasons. -- Editor

Freemasonry is the science by which morality is taught through the visible symbols and instructive traditions associated with the erection of King Solomon's Temple some 3,000 years ago. Like every science and permanent institution, Freemasonry is built on certain conceded principles. These include a belief in the one living and true God, a revelation of His Will, the resurrection of the body, and the immortality of the soul. When we say, "one God," we refer to the supreme and benevolent being in which a man places his ultimate trust. We are a non-

denominational institution accepting men of all faiths. Freemasonry is however, supportive of every religion believing in one God. It denies to no man his particular theological or secular beliefs, but rather complements those beliefs.

Without an expressed belief in these principles, no man can ever become a Freemason. Acceptance of the Fatherhood of God is the very foundation of the Masonic Institution. From the Fatherhood of God logically flows the Brotherhood of Man.

The Masonic Fraternity stands before the world today, not merely as a marvelous monument of antiquity, but older, larger, and more widely spread than almost any other human institution, having maintained for so many centuries the essentials of its primary organization. It has long outlived the circumstances which gave it birth. The necessities which called Freemasonry into being have long ago ceased to exist. Originally a company of stonemasons and builders whose monuments of rare skill now adorn almost every part of the old world, the hand of time has brought those operative labors to a close. But the everlasting principles upon which our Beloved Ancient Craft was founded are as intact today as when they emerged from the very shadows of history. Since its founding, dynasties have come and gone, nations have been born and buried, and countless orders and societies have been organized and passed into obscurity. Our Order has maintained its ancient organization, teaching its lessons of love, peace on earth, good will toward men, and is today a great and strong organization. It is true that our Fraternity no longer has cathedrals and monuments of stone to build, but it has even more noble work to perform than ever before.

Freemasonry is a broad system of ethics, a science of human duties, and a system of morals accepted by all religions as essential to human excellence based upon the recognition of Divine Truth, that mankind has a common origin and a common destiny; that God is the Creator and Father of all of us. Out of that relationship with Deity grows the Brotherhood of Man. Freemasonry's great purpose is to intensify that relationship. Freemasonry teaches love, faith, and duty; unites man in the strong embrace of fraternal fellowship, and induces emulation of who

can best work and best agree. Freemasonry thus becomes a school wherein are taught not only the virtues, but the useful lessons of everyday life.

The Temple of King Solomon signifies to us the Temple of our bodies, that is, our Inner Spiritual Temple. The tools and implements used in the building of Solomon's Temple signify to us the cultivation of the virtues to be practiced in the erection of the inner spiritual temple of man. The traditions associated with Solomon's Temple serve as worthy examples for our imitation, and inspire in us a love of what is good and true.

Freemasonry teaches us that the most important part of life lies in the discharge of our duties toward God and our fellow man. That eminent patron of Freemasonry, St. John the Evangelist, so old that he had to be carried in the arms of his friends into an assembly of children, lifted himself up and said, "Little children, love one another." When asked, "Have you nothing else to tell us?" he replied, "I say this again and again, because if you do this, nothing more is needed." That is the foundation of Freemasonry.

Freemasonry is not a mere pastime; nor a mere amusement. It is an active, living principle. Its ritual, its symbolism, and its drama are not empty ceremonies. They serve to exemplify and impart important truths for mankind. Freemasonry adapts its theories, its ethical thought and its teachings to the practical relations of life.

There are no dogmas in Freemasonry. Its so called "secrecy" is confined to simple means of communication and methods of recognition. Its tenets are universally approved. What Freemasonry condemns no good man upholds. The essence of Freemasonry is character. A man is what he does. The Mason's life and worth is not measured by wealth, fame, or fortune, but by faithful, consistent, and unselfish service. In like manner, the measure and worth of any institution is the effect it has upon the individual and society.

What has Freemasonry given to mankind and society? It helped pave the way for freedom of speech. It has ever been the enemy of any power that suppressed free thought and the enslavement of the mind. It rejects bigotry, superstition, and persecution of all types; and the ignorance and fanaticism that invented instruments of torture and deprivation. It points out to man that free thought and free speech, and the study of the sciences, are necessary for mankind's mental and intellectual emancipation; that the study of nature brings man's soul nearer to his Creator; and that knowledge drives out ignorance and superstition. It has taught mankind that, after he has emancipated himself from the vices that tyrannize and oppress, he must learn to govern himself wisely by practicing the Cardinal Virtues of Freemasonry: Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence, and Justice.

Man is a social creature. As such, our nature compels us to seek the companionship of others. We, therefore, see our Brothers and their families, animated by the same noble purpose, meeting in the Lodge where they can feel the hearty touch of the hand, hear words of inspiration and encouragement, and enjoy the pleasure, entertainment, and fellowship of this time-honored institution. While gathered in assemblies, we confer our ceremonial degrees, provide relief to the indigent, assistance to the worthy, and administer systems of care to those who are less fortunate. Freemasonry is all of this and much, much more. Beneath and beyond all of these is the deep,

permanent passion for the betterment of the Brotherhood of Man. Freemasonry, ever supportive of religion, benevolence, and morality, places before man the incentives to goodness through the contemplation of the Holy Principles of Divine Truth. The tenets of our Ancient Order are Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth-and first among them is Brotherly Love. It is the very cement which holds together the social edifice of this world. No one can measure the extent of human sympathy or brotherly love, but we know it to be one of the mightiest social forces of all time, and that without it, life would be a merciless and cruel existence. We know that when there is an unselfish love in the hearts of men, the better nature within each of us responds in kind. It is this kindly spirit of brotherhood, the gentle touch of the hand, and the sympathetic word that brings forth a harvest of good deeds, noble thoughts, and the highest aspirations of mankind. Freemasonry has ever been the patron of learning. Its votaries long ago discovered that ignorance was the cause of nearly all of the evils and dangerous environments that afflict humanity; that education dispelled this evil, set free the victims of its influence, and put a smile where terror and despair had planted sorrow. In its unending efforts to eliminate such human afflictions, Freemasonry has perhaps performed its greatest labor, in helping to break down the walls of religious hatred and intolerance that for too long divided men into opposing sects and hostile camps. The great religious ecumenical councils of today, and the religious tolerance and mutual understanding they endeavor to convey, have been the foundation and practice of Freemasonry since time immemorial. The Freemason is thus prepared through ceremonies, ritual and moral lessons to undertake his Grand Mission to teach, by precept and example, all that is beautiful and useful in this life.

After all of the great lectures on philosophy have been delivered, when the wisest statesmen shall have done their utmost to alleviate what is harsh and cruel in social conditions, and science shall have unraveled the mysteries of the universe, there will still be the necessity for a kindly smile, a helping hand, a cup of water, and a quiet word of encouragement. It is because Freemasonry has ever given the cup of water, extended a hand to one who has fallen, and spoken words of comfort and cheer, that millions of good men of every religion and culture, and from every corner of the world have knelt at its altar. It is these same men, Brothers in spirit and deed, with eyes uplifted and hearts responsive to the needs of those who are journeying through life with them, that form the Masonic Fraternity throughout the world. It is the good and true men of this Brotherhood that live with the great satisfaction which comes only from relieving suffering, dispensing happiness, and to aid the unification of mankind. The structure of Freemasonry includes many organizations which we call our "Masonic Family." Just to name a few; Masonic organizations include (in part) the Blue Lodges, the Scottish and York Rite, and the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine. Ladies organizations include the Order of the Eastern Star, and the Amaranth, with membership open to men who are 'Freemasons. Youth organizations include Job's Daughters and Rainbow for Girls for young women, and the Order of DeMolay for young men.

Each of these organizations has its own unique ceremonies, and supports charitable and philanthropic causes. Every day the Masonic Family is responsible for contributing, literally, millions of dollars in charitable donations, and thousands of volunteer hours to worthwhile causes of every kind.

This, my Brethren, is Freemasonry. May it live on, through us, for countless ages, and may we be ever worthy to spread Masonic Light for the generations yet to come. To these, our principal beliefs and poetic truths, we say as our forefathers did before us:

So Mote It Be