"FAITH, HOPE, AND CHARITY"

INTRODUCTION

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:

10 And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran.
11 And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep.
12 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 that the three principal rounds, or rungs, of Jacob's ladder are labelled Faith, Hope and Charity. But interestingly, those words do not appear in that chapter. We must look to 1 Corinthians Chapter 13 to find:

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 two ideas, and they work together well, if separated a bit biblically. Tonight, I will expand on these three virtues, how they relate to Freemasonry, and how we can pursue them in our daily lives as Masons.
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."

Simply put, the biblical definition of faith is "trusting in something you cannot explicitly prove." You must have faith in God in order to be a Mason. How you choose to exercise that faith, the doctrine you follow, the means of how you express your faith, can rightly be called your religion, and religious doctrine is left to the individual Mason to choose to follow.

Is Masonry in America a Christian organization? Many people might assume that as a majority of American Masons are Christian, especially Protestants, that Masonry is limited to Christians only. We open the Bible on our altar. The ancient landmarks refer to it as the volume of sacred law, while the ritual itself refers to the Bible. As all good masons know, the Holy Bible is a sacred book to Jews and Christians alike. But what if a Muslim brother joins the lodge? Are we required to place a Koran on the altar and allow them to obligate themselves on their volume of sacred law? The House of the Temple in Washington, D.C., headquarters of the Southern Jurisdiction of the Scottish Rite; 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 in this lodge or this district by any conscious act, but simply by demographics.

As Masons, we must have faith in God, that much is established. What else is there to have faith in, what else are we called to have blind trust in? Do we have faith in the Worshipful Master that he will govern in a manner that is best for the lodge? Do we have faith that every new brother will become a true and faithful servant among us? We pray for this very thing when he kneels in the center of the lodge room.

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! Consider, on the night we install the officers who will lead us for the ensuing year, we are focused only on the moment, and the next twelve months alone. But as the ritual reminds us, this is but an instant in the lifetime of our lodge. 50 years from now, our children’s children will only know the name of the Master for this year if they read the last page of the program at the Annual. Only the youngest Mason among us might be present to recall the particulars. Likewise, none of the Masons here tonight were sitting in this lodge 50 years ago. But just as they followed their obligations, were true and faithful to the craft, and preserved this lodge for us, we have an equal obligation to preserve this Lodge for future Masons to enjoy.

How do we pursue Faith in our daily lives as Masons? It is easy to get discouraged. We may be disappointed or disapprove of the actions or inactions of the Worshipful Master. We notice the number of men who are initiated, some passed, some even raised, who just drift away from the Lodge, never to be seen again. We may be concerned about the quality of our ritual, about struggling to fill all the parts for a degree. We may worry too much about money. We may worry too much about 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 successful degree that is well attended and well executed; a dinner that brings the brothers together in fellowship; a lodge picnic that brings out our families; even a business meeting that goes well. We hope for a good fundraiser that brings in money and becomes a regular event; a successful blood drive; or a Bring a Friend Night to increase our ranks. We all hope that a new member will stay active, especially when we are the one who has coached him and devoted a lot of our time to bring him through the degrees. Many lodges simply hope that a new Junior Deacon will show himself in time for the Annual Communication. Many lodges are hoping that they will not have to fold because of a lack of membership, money, or participation. But all of these are the superficial definition of hope, "a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen." 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. This kind of hope tells us to 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 our wishful thinking into a concrete and unshakable knowledge that things will turn out alright? In part, the answer lies in faith. Have faith in our officers and in God. Our ritual tells us that good works will bring us rewards in heaven. But many Christians, myself included, aren't comfortable with this
idea, when you take it in a literal context. We are taught that grace alone gets us into heaven and all the good works we do mean nothing without the grace of God. We declare that Masonry is not a religion; and yet in our ritual, we tell candidates that good works are necessary to enter the Celestial Lodge above. So how do we reconcile this? Another way to look at this phrase is not in the literal sense but in a symbolic one. When we do good work, the reward is not after we have laid down our working tools; but right here in our lodge. When we memorize and perform good ritual, when we follow the Ancient Landmarks, when we spread the cement of brotherly love and affection, we are erecting that spiritual building right here among the brethren of the Lodge, and we are ensuring that it continues long after we are gone.

CHARITY

There are many national charities founded or supported by Masons: The Shriners Hospitals, The Knights Templar Eye Foundation, The Cryptic Masons Medical Research Foundation, The Royal Arch Research Assistance Philanthropy, The Scottish Rite Learning Centers, The Masonic Service Association's Disaster Relief Fund, The Tall Cedars and Muscular Dystrophy, The Grotto and Cerebral Palsy. Most of these are well-known, and individual Masons support each one of them. It is estimated that Masons contribute 750 million dollars a year in the United States alone to these efforts, that's over 2 million dollars a day, every day. Considering how many charitable efforts occur at the blue lodge level that number is actually much higher.
In Virginia, lodges work with the Red Cross to organize blood drives that are very successful. We adopt city streets and keep them free of litter. We donate to local food banks. Three dollars of each member's dues every year goes to the Masonic Home, to provide for our older brothers, their wives and widows. We donate additional money to the Home throughout the year. Amazon.com has a terrific service, Amazon Smile. When you want to buy something from Amazon, enter "smile.amazon.com" instead and a portion of the sale is donated to the charity of your choice, such as the Masonic Home, at no additional cost to you. These are all good charities and they deserve our support. They certainly seem convenient. But a donation taken automatically from an online purchase, from your annual dues, or the act of throwing two or three dollars in a basket: Can we really call this CHARITY? Doesn't it seem a little bit sanitized? Antiseptic? Detached? While the cause is worthy, the action is so removed from any effort or real involvement on our part. Do you see the person who receives the charity? Do you visit the Masonic Home? Are you even aware of the good you are doing, or is the act of charity itself 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. So I must ask the question, are these 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 to the Masonic Home? Here is one answer, in a place we don't seem to be looking. We have a number of elderly brethren who still live nearby and do not attend regularly. For every member of the lodge you see here on a
regular basis, there are ten members out there who you don't see at all. These men are just as entitled to your friendship and brotherly love as those who you see all the time. What do we do for them? What can we do for them? Is it something as simple as yardwork? Do they need something painted? Do they need something repaired? A wheelchair ramp for their front door, for them or their wife? Do we just need to call them, or drop in and visit, just to spend time with them? We have a number of widows as well. Our ritual specifically calls on us to care for our widows and orphans. Do we even do that anymore? 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.