

# The Fundamentals of Freemasonry

By Right Worshipful Lonnie L. Godfrey

The fundamental elements, or basics, of our Fraternity are comparable to the old adage of the three “R’s” of our educational system: **Reading**, **‘Riting**, and **‘Rithmetic**. Fraternally, the three “R’s” are Respect, Ritual, and Renewal.

Our Fraternity teaches Respect, especially respect for God, the Creator and Father of all. Before a man becomes a Mason, he must firmly believe in the existence of one true God and the immortality of the soul. One of the first lessons taught to us is to ask for Divine guidance in all our endeavors. Masonic reverence for God makes no requirement regarding religion, sectarian or denominational. Masonry teaches respect for the rights and opinions of others as well as the religious and political views of others without allowing our own particular opinions to interfere with true brotherly love and friendship.

If we respect the Fatherhood of God, then we can accept the Brotherhood of Man.

The next essential is Ritual. Masonry has been defined as a beautiful system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols. Ritual is one of the oldest methods of teaching. Our Fraternity uses this method to teach great and important lessons, regarding truth and life. Yet the teachings of our ritual and their meanings are left to the individual Mason. Only he can determine their personal significance and apply them to his life. It is a matter of the individual heart.

In fact, it is the duty of each Master Mason to seek out the great lessons of life from the ritual. The ritualistic ceremonies beautifully portray lessons that reflect growth in awareness from youth and manhood to the maturity of age. To make men wiser, better, and happier is the aim of Freemasonry. This, in turn, promotes social virtues and the general welfare of society.

When a Mason is able to recite the lectures and ritual with an understanding of those lessons, then and only then, do they become a way of life. In the words of Reverend Joseph Fort Newton, 33°, a noted author, theologian, educator, and Mason:

“When he can look out over the rivers, the hills and the far horizon with a profound sense of his own littleness in the vast scheme of things, and yet have faith, hope, and courage, which is the root of every virtue. . .

When he has learned how to make friends and to keep them, and above all how to keep friends with himself. . .

When he can be happy and high-minded amid the meaner drudgeries of life.

When no voice of distress reaches his ears in vain, and no hand seek his without response.

When he finds good in every faith that helps any man to lay hold of divine things and see majestic meanings in life, whatever the name of that faith may be.

When he can look into a wayside puddle and see something beyond mud, and into the face of the most forlorn fellow mortal and see something beyond sin.

When he knows how to pray, how to love, how to hope.

When he has kept faith with himself, with his fellowmen, and with his God; in his hand a sword for evil, in his heart a bit of a song – glad to live, but not afraid to die!

Such a man has found the real secret of Masonry, and the one which it is trying to give all the world.”

This brings us to the third “R”: Renewal. There is much discussion today about renewal. Renewal begins in our Blue Lodges. Many Brethren have become alarmed at our declining membership. The task of Masonic renewal belongs to

every member. Many men live a lifetime and never know that they must ask for admission to the oldest, most purposeful, and greatest Fraternity. They do not realize that they will not be invited.

They must come in of their own free will and accord, without persuasion. I think there is some value to the reasoning behind this thinking, but there are many things about Freemasonry that we can freely talk about which could bring about interest in Freemasonry that could lead to a request for a petition.

The renewal of our Fraternity is not dependent upon the millions of good, moral, would-be Masons. The task of renewal is dependent upon us - the active Masons. How much visibility within your community does your Lodge have? What effects do you or your Lodge have in your communities? Do we, as Masons, in all walks of life, revere God, have respect for our Brethren, and remain dedicated to liberty and freedom? Do we practice charity and brotherly love? If we are a society of builders, what are we building?

When we begin to answer and put a plan in effect about these questions, then and only then will we have begun a process of renewal.

In closing, I am reminded of a young man who wanted to test the wisdom of an old, wise man of his community. He decided to ask the old man a question. Holding a small bird in his hands behind his back, he asked the wise man if the bird was alive or dead? If the wise man answered alive, the young man was going to break the bird's neck. If the wise man answered that the bird was dead, he would let the bird live.

Armed with this plan, the young man went to the wise man and put the question to him. After a pause, the wise man looked into the eyes of the youth and said, "The answer to your question is in your hands!"

Similarly, Brethren, the quality of our Fraternity is in our hands; through our attention to the fundamentals of Freemasonry. Through our respectful attitudes

toward God and our Brethren, through our study and mentoring of the lessons of our ritual, and through our efforts to encourage and support Masonic renewal!