

From the Texas Grand Lodge

Many people coming to Freemasonry for the first time ask the question "What makes a Mason?" This page is an attempt to answer that question, in the best way possible: pointing out the duties that are incumbent upon all Masons, from the newest Entered Apprentice to the oldest Master Mason. Here, then, are the primary duties of a Mason:

1. To God

Although Freemasonry is not a religion, it seeks to inculcate reverence for God. In Freemasonry, God is represented as the Creator and Architect of the Universe. In its rituals and symbols, Freemasonry seeks to emulate the architectural action of God, while seeking a greater understanding of the Creator.

2. To Your Neighbor

Freemasonry has three principal tenets: Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth.

Brotherly Love teaches the Freemason to regard the whole of humanity as our brothers and to approach all men with an open heart, judging each man as an individual and never for the honors that the world at large may have seen fit to bestow.

The tenet of Relief is an application of Brotherly Love: by contributing to the relief of a person in distress the Freemason acts as a brother towards humanity. When contributing to someone's relief the Freemason does not seek attention or fame; he acts out of a true love for humanity, not celebrity.

Binding the first two tenets is the tenet of Truth. In all of his dealings, the Freemason strives to avoid deceit and hypocrisy, treating everyone as an equal. Have you someone say that something is "on the level"? This expression comes from Freemasonry, and exemplifies the tenet of Truth: treating everyone equally, and always dealing plainly with them.

3. To Yourself

In order to balance his obligations, a Freemason has a duty to himself. In this sphere, the duty of a Freemason extends to pursuing a vocation, constantly learning, and keeping his duties to his family.

Industriousness is a virtue that is regarded highly in Freemasonry, and hearkens back to the duty we owe to God. By contributing to God's creation through his labors, the Freemason enriches all around him and enables himself to carry out his duty of Relief.

Since God gave all men the capability of rational thought, Freemasonry encourages its members to always increase their education, particularly in the seven liberal arts and sciences. By compassing these fields, the Freemason enriches his mind and gains a greater understanding of God's creation.

Freemasonry teaches us, though, to temper our zeal when pursuing these goals. In order to live up to the ideals of Freemasonry, each Mason must also find time for his family. Family is so important to a Freemason that he may be excused from other duties if it interferes with his duty to his family.

4. Keeping our Passions Within Due Bounds

The most recognized symbols of a Freemason are the Square and Compass. The Square teaches the Freemason to always act towards others as he wishes they would act toward him, while the Compasses teach us to temper our actions and never to overstep our bounds in any of our endeavours.

As Freemasons we are always striving to keep the lessons of these symbols in our daily lives. By doing so we hope to ensure good reputations for ourselves, and our Fraternity, in both the public and private spheres of activity.

5. As a Citizen

Since Freemasonry is an ancient Fraternity, it has a deep reverence for the privilege of being a citizen. In ancient times, not all people within a country were eligible to be citizens; it was a privilege given to a few only.

Part of being a good citizen means to never interfere with a just government, and to live by its laws and perform the duties incumbent upon all citizens. A Freemason must never countenance rebellion against a good government, and must oppose all tyranny that he finds.

Adherence to these duties makes a man a Mason. As he deviates from them, the Mason debases not only himself, but his Fraternity. With dedication to these duties, all Masons enrich themselves and their world.

From the Pennsylvania Grand Lodge

WHAT MAKES A MAN A MASON?

By
George M. Free

What makes a man a Mason, O brother of mine?

**It isn't the due guard, nor is it the sign,
It isn't the jewel which hangs on your breast
It isn't the apron in which you are dressed**

**It isn't the step, nor the token, nor the grip,
Nor lectures that fluently flow from the lip,
Nor yet the possession of that mystic word
On five points of fellowship duly conferred.**

**Though these are essential, desirable, fine,
They don't make a Mason, O brother of mine.
That you to your sworn obligation are true
'Tis that, brother mine, makes a Mason of you.**

**Secure in your heart you must safeguard and trust,
With lodge and with brother be honest and just,
Assist the deserving who cry in their need,**

Be chaste in your thought, in your word and your deed.

**Support he who falters, with hope banish fear,
And whisper advice in an erring one's ear.
Then will the Great Lights on your path brightly shine,
And you'll be a Mason, O brother of mine.**

**Your use of life's hours by the gauge you must try,
The gavel of vices with courage apply;
Your walk must be upright, as shown by the plumb,
On the level, to bourn whence no travelers come,**

**The Book of your faith be the rule and the guide,
The compass your passions shut safely inside;
The stone which the Architect placed in your care
Must pass the strict test of His unerring square.**

**And then you will meet
with approval divine,
And you'll be a Mason,
O brother of mine.**

From the California Grand Lodge

What Makes a Mason

Robert M. Wolfarth, 32° The Northern Light, Vol. 38, № 3.

I have read a lot of lofty language by well-meaning Internet writers attempting to describe what makes a Mason. While no-one owns this definition, many have thoughts on it. Yet the rhetoric I've read is often far too general. Where are the specifics?

I'm not going to write about soaring eagles, laughing grandchildren, or Old Glory waving over a corn field. We all love apple pie. But associating it with Freemasonry doesn't delineate us from the profane, and it smacks of American exclusivity.

In humility, I submit for your consideration some concrete examples of how a Mason should act.

Recognize your fellow Mason as your brother. Ponder what that really means. But go one step further: treat *every* man as your brother. And every woman as your sister. Respect all. When you cross paths with strangers, do not regard them with suspicion, fear, or judgment. Assume instead that they are worthy of respect, consideration, and tolerance.

When you judge someone's words or actions, consider the intent more prominently than the effect. People are easier to forgive when it is clear that they meant no harm.

Always use your turn signal, even changing lanes or in a parking lot. Don't drive aggressively. Yield to everyone who has the right-of-way. If you are unsure who has the right-of-way, yield. Put a Masonic emblem on your rear bumper. You'll be amazed by how accountable it holds you for your actions behind the wheel.

Show no preference of friendliness toward one person over another. Be as likely to greet a local celebrity or a pretty lady as a trash collector.

When you are overcharged, raise the issue—politely. Similarly, when you are undercharged, go back and pay what you owe. The ethics are the same either way. For goods and services, you must pay the agreed upon price. No more, no less.

Consider yourself a success not when you are established in society or have obtained wealth, but when you are a good man accomplishing good deeds.

Smile at people.

Fix the sink *before* your wife asks. Then bring her flowers for no reason at all. Be more industrious than people expect of you. Never give anyone reason to consider you lazy.

Volunteer at your house of worship. At least a couple of hours. They could use the help.

Take up no more than one seat in a crowded, public waiting area. A typical man sets his bag in the empty seat next to him, ready to move it when someone asks to sit there. Set your bag under your seat. Take up only the room you need. No more. Don't make people have to ask you to free up a seat. If you're an able-bodied man, be the first to arise when someone who needs a seat is looking for one. Again, don't wait to be asked.

Donate to charity. Anonymously. In cash. Remove praise and the tax deduction incentive as motivations. Do it because it's the right thing to do. We live in a wealthy society by any measure. If more people gave—even a small percentage—then there would be plenty to go around. Do not fail to give generously.

Remove your hat when you go indoors or when you are introduced to someone. Yes, this includes your baseball cap.

In business, marital discussions, legal activity, and other such negotiations, don't seek maximum benefit for yourself. Instead, seek justice—which may call upon you to relinquish something you desire. Openly let others know that justice is what you seek. Such a premise, if responded in kind, generally results in more equitable solutions.

Pick up your neighbor's newspaper off the sidewalk and toss it onto his porch to save him a few steps.

Never mention to him that you do it.

When you sense that someone is following you as you enter a building or a room, open the door and let them pass first, even if it is several people. Greet them as they pass.

Once a month or so, send a "thanks for all you do" card or e-mail to someone.

Do not let self gain be your primary motivation to act or not act. I sometimes find myself wasting resources if I can tell myself that I'm not paying for it. I am now fighting to train myself that the reason I turn off the light is not just to save money (although that's a nice benefit), but because leaving the light on is wasteful, and therefore inherently wrong.

Befriend someone at least 20 years different from you in age. Befriend someone with a drastically different political and religious perspective. Learn from them. People like to talk about their areas of passion. Glean their philosophies, not their knowledge of cars. Learn to tolerate—nay, *celebrate* their differences. And remain friends.

Pick up trash on the street as you walk by. If there's no trash can nearby, carry the trash with you, even in your car, until you find one. Why look the other way from an injustice when you have the power to rectify it?

Most religions teach us to do good deeds, that we may be rewarded. But I say do good deeds because it is inherently holy to do them. Give with no thought of receiving. Seek no reward for benevolent actions! Be selfless in your gifts to the world—as selfless as you are able.

Many of these suggestions come down to this: Every time you are placed in a situation in which you must make a decision, consider first what is the right thing to do. Only secondarily should you consider what is profitable, expedient, face-saving, or expected of you.

If you adopt this consideration as a matter of course, you may be surprised to learn that very soon, considering what is right will become what is expected of you by other people. You might become the office ethicist, a moral authority of sorts in your home, or a person whose perspective is revered among your friends. If you are asked why you made a choice, don't hesitate to reply, Because it was the right thing to do. Surround yourself with people who understand this statement, not with those who look at you with puzzlement and try to equate *right* with *easy*.

Keep pushing yourself forward morally. If you look in the mirror this evening and honestly believe that you see a good man, then you are probably right. But don't accept that as victory. Take the next step! Become a great man. Focus not on being better than others, but on being better to others. Remember always that you are an ambassador of Freemasonry to all those around you.

Now, having read all of these thoughts, picture this: An entire Lodge of Masons who follow such a philosophy. Better, a whole Grand Lodge that adopts it. Continually pushing themselves to improve. Noted by the local papers as a group of men dedicated to noble deeds—selfless deeds. Or better still, Freemasons the world over who aren't simply nice guys, quietly attending Lodge and sending a check to charity now and then, but who collectively stand out as an example to the world of what men are capable of being.

This is what we can be.



Robert M. Wolfarth a native Texan, now calls Salt Lake City home. After six years working in defense and foreign policy for the US Congress in Washington, Robert moved into the medical device industry, where he is a director of regulatory affairs and quality assurance. Robert is fascinated with systems of ethics as influenced by different societies and religions, and is a writer by passion. He is a 32° Scottish Rite Mason, a Knight Templar, and a Noble of the Mystic Shrine. Robert is active in his community, the United Methodist Church, and Wasatch Lodge #1, serving there as Tyler and editor of *The Trestleboard*.