

# "It is the Internal Qualifications"

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In the lecture of the Entered Apprentice Degree, which all newly made Masons hear on their first night in Masonry, we learn that "it is the internal, and not the external qualifications which recommend a man to be made a Mason." We also learn that a charter is an instrument "authorizing certain brethren to initiate, pass and raise *all good men and true* who may apply for the purpose and whom they may find worthy."

How many of us really take these things to heart and consciously strive to make Masonry what the ancient charges and regulations prescribe that it should be -- a brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God, a fraternal haven for men of all races, creeds and religions, all backgrounds and all stations in life, provided only that they meet the qualifications of belief in a Supreme Being, good moral character, and "being a man, free-born, under the tongue of good report and coming well recommended?" How many of us, as individual Masons, see fit to take it upon ourselves to impose additional qualifications, such as "He must be a Christian," "He must not be a Catholic or a Jew," "He must not be a janitor or a bricklayer," "His salary must be at least \$10,000 per year," "He must be white," and myriad other conditions which a

brother imposes to suit his own personal beliefs rather than conforming to the philosophy of Masonry?

I have often heard a Brother say, regarding a prospective member, "Why, he's a waiter (or a janitor, or a ditchdigger)." I cannot say that I have ever heard a Brother express a belief that a candidate should be rejected for this reason, but by his evident air of distaste during the discussion, it is usually quite plain to those listening that the speaker is not at all pleased by the idea of having that individual in his lodge. While this type of unmasonic conduct will not influence the older, more experienced Masons who are trying hard to live the teachings of Masonry, it is certainly not a good example for the newer Masons who have not yet formed their Masonic philosophy of life. Each of these little incidents constitutes another brick in the wall of intolerance being erected around every one of us by those who are seeking to impose their own bigoted thinking upon the entire Fraternity.

One qualification which is imposed so often by individual brethren that many believe it to be a bona-fide requirement for membership is that a candidate must be white, or reasonably so. This false belief is much more prevalent among brethren in the United States than

anywhere else in the world. So much so, in fact, that it is difficult to find a non-white Mason in many parts of the country. I cannot state with certainty that a non-white Mason would be denied admission to a lodge if he attempted to visit, but in certain sections of the United States it would certainly cause a great deal of consternation among the members, and particularly among the officers who would be charged with the decision to admit him or turn him away. Why? If he is a Mason in good standing, and can produce proper voucher of his having been initiated, passed, and raised in a duly constituted lodge, there is no question as to what Masonic courtesy requires. Yet we will find, in many cases, that the brethren concerned will allow their personal prejudice to become the master of their judgment, to the detriment of the teachings of Masonry.

My study of this prejudice bears out my original belief that it is directed mostly against members of the Negro race. I cannot count the number of times I have been approached by well-meaning brethren who inform me, with the utmost seriousness, that they fear that a certain individual, who is a religious, clean-living person of high morals, and whom they like personally, is going to request a petition for membership. However, there is one catch: He is a Negro. "What shall I do to discourage him?" the brother asks, "How can I refuse him diplomatically?" The tragedy of this, My Brethren, is that the brother asks not "What shall I do to help break down this barrier?" but through misguided thinking, based on remarks he has heard passed by

other brethren, he is seeking a way to dissuade the man from petitioning. I have even heard brothers go so far as to state flatly that they would not sit in a lodge if a Negro visitor were to be admitted, but rather that they would depart from the lodge immediately. I ask you, My Brethren, is this what we are taught in Masonry?

Many newly made Masons are confused, and on occasion bitterly disappointed, when they learn of the prejudicial practices to which members of the Fraternity subscribe. They have joined Masonry out of a sincere desire to promote the general good of society. They have learned that the three principal tenets of Masonry are Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth, and they eagerly look forward to the opportunity of promoting these tenets. They are no sooner accepted into Masonry, however, than they are rudely awakened from their idealistic dreams. They find two of these tenets, Brotherly Love and Truth, being flagrantly ignored. They are disillusioned with Masonry before they are well into it. Admittedly, not all new Masons even become aware of these violations of our basic tenets until much later, as the problem does not arise in many lodges. When they do notice it, they feel nothing — they have learned to accept without protest that which once would have seriously shaken their beliefs. It is not to any of these brethren that I am speaking. Rather, it is to those in the first group I have mentioned that my remarks will apply.

It is not to be supposed, or even hoped, that a revolution will be brought about overnight, that bigoted thinking and personal prejudices

will be banished from the lodge room tomorrow, or even next week. But it behooves every one of us, each Mason and particularly each member of a non-white jurisdiction such as ours, to take up our trowels and do our part toward spreading the cement of brotherly love and affection throughout all mankind, in every land and without regard to race, creed, color, occupation or other external qualifications.

This is not a plea for change in any of our valid lodge landmarks or practices. It is merely a reminder to every brother within hearing that Masonry and its teachings requires of all of us adherence to certain principles and precepts, that if you want to live according to the Masonic way of life, and hope to be credited with retaining that goodness of heart, that purity of intention and that love of virtue which we all have been thought to possess at one time, you cannot ignore these principles. As a Mason, it is your duty not only to live by them, but to dedicate yourself to instilling them in others, particularly in Masons. Remember that you are authorized to correct the irregularities of your less informed brethren, and that you must be ever ready to stretch forth a helping hand to raise a fallen brother. You are to whisper good counsel in his ear and, in the friendliest manner possible, endeavor to bring about a reformation. This means that when you see a brother straying from the broad pathway of

Masonry; when you know that he is transgressing its principles and tenets, it is your sacred duty to endeavor to bring him back into the fold, to strive with all that is in you to raise this fallen brother. When you do this, you are a Mason. When you can truthfully say to yourself and to the world that you are living and teaching the vital precepts of Masonry, and not just paying them lip service, then, my friend, you are a true brother. You can never achieve this state of perfection by a lackadaisical attitude; by remaining silent when you hear unmasonic conversations among other brethren. You must be aggressive; you must constantly strive to make less informed brethren see, not your viewpoint, but the Masonic viewpoint based on the philosophy which has been and is being taught you in the lodge. You must never be afraid of what others will think. If you are promulgating the true teachings of Masonry, no brother can think anything but good of you. He will say to himself, "There is a brother who has the courage of his convictions and is not afraid to argue them. Would that I had such courage." You will have right on your side, and it has been historically proven, time and again, that right makes might.

In closing, allow me to remind you once again, My Brethren that "it is the internal, and not the external, qualifications which recommend a man to be made a Mason."



I daily examine myself in a threefold manner: in my transactions with men, if I am upright; in my intercourse with friends, if I am faithful; and whether I illustrate the teachings of my master in my conduct.

—Confucius.