

WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEACH

CHALLENGING FREEMASONRY

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The other day I was sitting and having lunch with my Masonic mentor. During our conversation, I mentioned in casual conversation a brother whom I knew was not much of a reader. I told my mentor that I could understand it if a person tried to gain education in a different way, as we all learn differently. Much to my surprise, his response became the topic of this speech tonight. My mentor explained that you can get education from other areas, but more importantly, he gently reminded me that as Masons we are taught to challenge ourselves to include taking the time to read. It became clearer to me, in that moment, that I was making excuses for my fellow brother and enabling him to do less, rather than challenging himself to be more. How often do we do this to our fellow brothers and ourselves? What do we gain with just doing the bare minimum? Will our rough ashlar ever be smooth with just “good enough?” The thought of being ordinary has never been the focus of Freemasonry, unless the tagline of “Making Good Men Better” is just a hollow statement of truth.

Throughout our Masonic journey, we are taught, especially in the Fellowcraft Degree, that learning is an integral part of our growth as a man. Most of us can recall the stair lecture and its focus on the several liberal arts and sciences, and the instruction to use this education to seek further light and develop our minds. Our Masonic forefathers believed our educational growth was so important that a specific degree was designed around it. If this is to be true, then why have we abandoned our quest for education and challenging our minds? In short, we have become distracted and intellectually lazy. Men of today’s society want quick information, and the thought of serious study and contemplation distracts from moving on to the next piece of mental entertainment. If our Masonic desire is knowledge, then we are currently coming up well short of that ideal. Dudley Wright in his 1924 book, *The Ethics of Freemasonry*, wrote the following, “A thorough knowledge of this history, philosophy, and science of Freemasonry should and ought to be the ambition of every member of the Craft, and when he has studied and is well versed in these subjects, he can truthfully answer the question: What came you here to do?”

The ultimate quest for any Mason is to know thy self. It is the quintessential design on our Masonic Trestleboard and from it we learn who and what we are, and all the while we are getting closer to our Creator. But how many brothers take the time to really contemplate this very

personal and spiritual endeavor? Knowing ourselves will not just come from our memorization of ritual, nor will it come from multiple charitable acts. We cannot rely on the perceptions of others as to who we are. To do so is to rely on all their own ideas, thoughts, biases, and so on. However, many brothers look to others for validation of self-worth which ultimately can sow the seeds of fear, self-doubt, getting us no closer to understanding who we are deep down inside. Where will it come from? It will be revealed by a deeper understanding of your being and relationship with your God. The tools to do this are all around us in Freemasonry. The intense study of our symbolism and philosophies will lead to contemplation and critical thinking. In time, this study will reveal our true nature and complete Freemasonry's promise of a better man.

In the end, we can only look to our Entered Apprentice Degree for some guidance in challenging ourselves. It tells us that in our leisure we should strive to improve our Masonic knowledge. This statement is imparted to us early on in our Masonic journey, as it sets the tone for what we need to do as builders of the craft, and, more especially, ourselves. Our knowledge will not miraculously come from our membership in this fraternity, nor will it come from wearing a ring. The true work of Freemasonry will come from our diligent efforts of contemplative study and critical thinking about our history, philosophies, and the secrets revealed to us from our symbolic form of instruction. Those who choose not to follow this path will learn that there are consequences for their actions that will ultimately lead to a life of intellectual decay and the perpetual darkness of ignorance. Tonight's speech is not meant to answer all the questions, but it is call to action to start the conversation on how best we can challenge ourselves. I will leave it up to you to heed this call and take on this most important endeavor.