

WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH

BOOK REVIEW

The Ethics of Freemasonry

By: Dudley Wright

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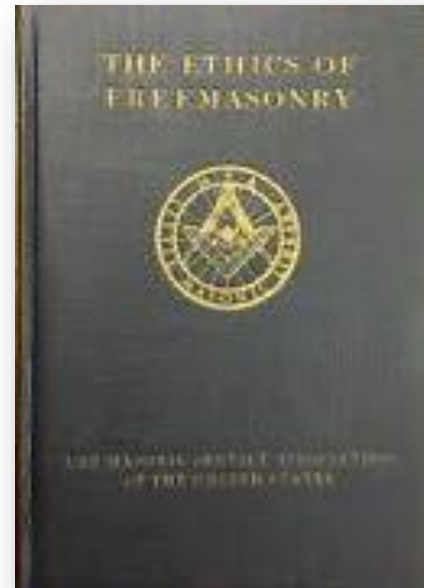
Few books less than one hundred pages can make such an impact on so many levels to the reader. Dudley Wright's *The Ethics of Freemasonry*, which consists of a mere eighty-eight pages and is slightly larger than the average smartphone, does just that.

The book's title caught my attention and reminded me of a college course that I took called "*Business Ethics*." That course was for a full semester and had dozens of assignments and tests, yet the core lesson can be summarized in one simple statement, "there is no such thing as business ethics; there is just ethics." The lessons of that course, however, were in the implementation of ethics, which is much easier said than done unless one commits consistent time and energy to study and understand ethical practices.

Could a similar statement be made for Freemasonry, "there is no such thing as ethics of Freemasonry; there is just ethics?" I was soon to find out.

Ethics is a guiding philosophy defined as moral principles that govern an individual or group's behavior or the conduct of an activity. It is founded on standards of right and wrong that prescribe what humans ought to do, usually regarding rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness, or specific virtues.

The Ethics of Freemasonry was published in 1924, and Dudley Wright wastes no time helping Masons better understand the answer to the question, "why are we Freemasons?" This question may seem obvious and trivial to many Masons as we often hear responses such as: "I want to be a better person, a better husband, a better father, etc." But do we, as Masons, really know *how* to do this? And perhaps a better question is, "are we honestly implementing the lessons of Freemasonry in our daily lives, as we obligate ourselves to do?"



I would challenge most Mason's affirmative responses to that question, including myself. If we're being completely honest with ourselves, we know that the implementation of ethics is much more difficult than the attempted belief and understanding of it.

Wright says, "Masonry is a deep unfathomable mine. For the candidate to fully comprehend the magnificence and utility of Freemasonry, he must become a plodding and diligent student of the hidden mysteries of nature and of science. Freemasonry is ever new, and it responds today to the call of human nature and the needs of the heart just as readily as it did centuries ago."

Too often, we as humans feel the need to display a perception of ourselves to the world that lacks the genuineness of our private lives. Wright says, "until the tenants of the Craft are demonstrated in our daily life, we are but Ritualists only and not real Masons; honorary or passive members instead of honorable and active workers of the world's history. Our tenants have ever been a response to the world's needs because Freemasonry stands for the things that are eternal."

Wright also occasionally addresses the opponents of Freemasonry throughout this book. To the claims of Freemasonry being anti-Christian or setting plots against the government, he says, "one's ignorance could easily have been overcome by a brief survey of Freemasonry's achievements. It is clear that Freemasonry is working for the friendship of the whole human family and is not only bringing man nearer to man, but it is bringing man nearer to God without the aid or hindrance of sectarianism."

As the book continues, Wright makes some very direct statements about the members of our Craft, stating, "every member of the Craft is either an asset or a liability. Every lodge member who is not a real benefit to his fellow man is a liability and not an asset, and if the majority of members in any lodge answer to that description, then the lodge itself becomes a drag on the community and prevents progress."

Now that's a statement that will either motivate you or upset you as a Freemason. If it upsets you, then I challenge you to ask yourself why you feel offended or defensive toward such a statement. Would you not agree that some men make our lodges better and others make our lodges worse? Do you know by name and face all the men in your lodge? If not, is that because you don't attend regularly or because they don't? If your lodge's attendance has faded, why? Has the quality of the men in your lodge been watered down because the West Gate has been weakened?

Wright continues, "If the lessons of Freemasonry are not being used, then it is being wasted; the liabilities within are increasing at a rapid rate. Strength or weaknesses, solvency or bankruptcy, will be the fate of Freemasonry."

Keep in mind that this book was written in 1924. Clearly, the problems that face our Craft today were present even one hundred years ago. Which begs the question, how will Freemasonry fare with the passing of another century?

Despite directly pointing the finger at the primary problems of Freemasonry - its members, Wright doesn't harp on this for the sake of creating drama or creating feelings of guilt within the Masonic reader about the Fraternity. Quite the contrary. Wright remains extremely positive throughout the book. He reminds us that we are all ambassadors of the Craft, saying, "if every member of the Craft

would regard himself as its Ambassador, or Apostle, and live accordingly, the slurs and aspersions against the institution would fade away entirely.”

Wright reminds us that Freemasons should constantly ask ourselves: “What have I done for Freemasonry?” He states that the strength and greatness of Freemasonry lays within our intelligence, our service to others, the practice of our tenets, the remembrance of our landmarks, and the benevolence and love we share with society. According to Wright, “Freemasonry is a great University where men come together on the common ground of mutual esteem, respect, and fraternity. There the minor differences of creed and opinion are forgotten: hand clasps hand, eye greets eye, and hearts thrill and throb in unison.”

The first question all Masons are asked when being initiated into Freemasonry is, “where did you first become a Mason?” The answer is, “in my heart.” Wright’s book, *The Ethics of Freemasonry*, does a superb job of reminding the reader of the natural and unbreakable connection between ethics and Freemasonry. The connection is so obvious, that a Mason could easily argue that ethics is a characteristic planted in all our hearts when we are born.

The Ethics of Freemasonry is available in print-on-demand editions from online book sellers. Original copies are occasionally found in antiquarian bookstores.