

## **THE ETHICS OF FREEMASONRY**

by

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During my recent reading of the literature of Freemasonry, I came across a statement that I had not considered before. This statement started me thinking and attempting to correct what was portrayed. This astounding remark was in regard to the fact that there are, literally, thousands of books on the history, philosophy, and symbolism inherent in our brotherhood. We have read the historical and symbolical books written by Alfred Gallatin Mackey. We have read the books written by Albert Pike. We have read the books written by H. L. Haywood, and Joseph Fort Newton. However, the author reported, that, nowhere in the literature of Freemasonry can there be found a book or article written about the ethics of our fraternity.

Let me commence by first defining just what is meant by the term “ethics”. Ethics has been defined as, “a system of moral principles”. This definition has been expanded to include, “The rules of conduct in respect to a particular class of human actions or a particular group, culture, etc.” Another definition contains the following, “That branch of philosophy dealing with values relating to human conduct with respect to the rightness or wrongness of certain actions and to the goodness and badness of the motives and ends of such actions. “ Finally, there is the following definition, “The body of moral principles governing or distinctive of a certain culture, eg. Judeo-Christian ethic, Islamic ethic, etc.” These definitions can be distilled in the statement that ethics are, “a complex of moral precepts held as rules of conduct followed by an individual.”

The ethics of Freemasonry can be said to have been derived from the philosophy and thoughts of those great thinkers of the past. Our brotherhood’s ethics come from the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, Maimonides, and many others whose words have influenced cultural thought throughout the centuries. Freemasonry has gained much of its philosophy and ethical system from those who have come before. We are the product of these great thinkers.

It is difficult to write about the ethics of Freemasonry. Our ethics start with the “furthermores” that each brother promises to fulfill when taking the obligations of each degree. To outline those “furthermores” would be to violate the promise made in the obligation of the first degree to keep the secrecy of the promises made from those who are not a brother of that degree nor to one who is a “profane”, that is, a non-Mason. The new brother promises to “hide and conceal” the secrets of our fraternity.

It is in the obligations undertaken by each and every brother, that we find a code of conduct that is meant to rule all of our future transactions with mankind. We square our actions with the square of virtue. The compass is meant to circumscribe us and keep us within due bounds.

From where, then, do these promises have their genesis. For this, we look in the most important part of Freemasonry, our Book of Holy Scripture, that “Great Light In Masonry”, the Holy Bible. In the Old Testament book of Leviticus 19:18 we find, “Thou shalt not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but shall love thy neighbor as thyself. I am the Lord”. This has become known as the Golden Rule.

Centuries ago, a renowned Biblical commentator and rabbi was asked to sum up all of the Old Testament into one sentence. After much thought, that rabbi stated, “Do unto your neighbor as you would have him do unto you. All else is commentary”. I will paraphrase that legendary statement with a distillation of what is contained in the ethical principles of Freemasonry . The following statement is the embodiment of what it means to be a Mason. It is the definition of the Golden Rule as it applies to Freemasonry. Finally, it is the essence of all of the “furthermores” that are contained in the obligations of the three degrees of Blue Lodge Masonry. “Do unto your Masonic brother as you would have him do unto you. All of the teaching of the ritual and the lectures in the three degrees are simply commentary explaining the Golden Rule of Freemasonry.”