

# The Masonic Lodge (Freemasonry)

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## Introduction

To many, the Masonic Lodge appears to be a secret and fraternal organization that emphasizes morality, as well as charitable and benevolent work. Indeed Masons themselves have often defined themselves in these terms, though they often disagree among themselves as to how to define Freemasonry with precision (See Mackey: 269; Daggett: 237). With such an understanding of Masonry in mind, many people view it as, at worst, a somewhat strange, but harmless society, and at best, a good and beneficial one. They also don't see much difference between the Masonic Lodge and the local Rotary club.

It will surprise many, therefore, to learn that most Christians in the United States (at least 90 million, including Roman Catholics, the Orthodox, the LCMS and other Lutherans, as well as Evangelical churches) belong to churches that forbid membership in Freemasonry because they regard it as incompatible with Christianity. Why is it incompatible? Because the Masonic Lodge is held to be a deistic religious organization that requires belief (members must swear an oath) in a god that is not the triune God, and a god who is accessible apart from Jesus Christ through any religion that believes in god as Creator. In addition, they teach that entrance to the life to come is gained by following the precepts and morality of Freemasonry, that God will let them into heaven merely because they have been faithful Masons.

Lutherans view Masons as belonging to a religious organization that practices idolatry. The 1991 Luther's Small Catechism states in Question 21: "When do people have other gods? They have other gods . . . B. when they believe in a god who is not the triune God. . . . D. when they join in the worship of one who is not the triune God." Similarly Question 179 states: "What do the Scriptures teach about our life in the church? They teach that . . . C. we should avoid false teachers, false churches, and all organizations that promote a religion that is contrary to God's Word." The LCMS holds that membership in the Masonic Lodge (a) breaks the First Commandment because the God believed in and worshiped by the Masons is not the true God, and (b) denies the Gospel of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ by teaching that entrance into heaven does not depend on Jesus, but instead depends on being a Mason. Some Masons either strongly reject the allegation that they are a religion, or teach that their religion is no different than Christianity. The remainder of this study will ascertain whether this is true. After briefly examining demographics, history, and sources of Masonic teaching, the study will determine whether the Masonic Lodge is a religion, and their understanding of God, and salvation.

## Demographics

As of 1998, there were approximately 2.1 million Masons in the United States in about 15,000 lodges. This is a considerable decline from 1964, when they numbered an estimated 4.1 million. There are Grand Lodges in all 50 states.

## Origin & History

Masonic ritual claims that Freemasonry descended from the events surrounding the building of Solomon's Temple. Other authorities have asserted that Masonry began at the time of the Tower of Babel, or even with Adam himself. Most informed Masons reject such assertions, however, and hold that Freemasonry, as we have it today, dates from 1717 when four Craft lodges met in a London tavern and established a constitution for "Free" and non-working Masons.

Masonic scholars also recognize that the teaching and practice of Freemasonry comes from a variety of sources. These would include the Bible, the Knights Templars, Jewish Cabbalists, Rosicrucians, ancient mystery cults, gnosticism and Middle Age stonemasons. These stonemasons were a respected and orthodox Christian guild that built the great cathedrals of Europe. Their work required them to travel extensively, and they developed a set of signs and special handshakes to identify one another. After the time of the Sixteenth Century, when the building of new churches declined, stonemason guilds began accepting nonworking masons within their ranks, who eventually outnumbered the working masons, and adopted and expanded their symbolism.

Whereas the (operative) working stonemasons were Christian, the new nonworking (speculative) masons decided to be more inclusive in their membership requirements. In their constitution of 1723 the nonworking masons held that masons only were required to believe "that Religion to which all men agree, leaving their particular opinions to themselves" (Whalen: 37). In other words, only faith in a Creator God was now required, and specific religious beliefs (such as faith in Jesus Christ or the triune God) were no longer necessary. Any person who believed in God was welcome to join. Only atheists, women, children, the insane, or the physically deformed were disallowed membership.

Freemasonry has had a storied history in the United States. Many early patriots were Masons, including George Washington, Ben Franklin, Paul Revere, and eight or nine signers of the Declaration of Independence. As many as 14 Presidents have been masons: Washington, Monroe, Jackson, Polk, Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, Garfield, McKinley, Teddy Roosevelt, Taft, Harding, Franklin Roosevelt, Truman, and Ford. In 1923, about 300 out of 435 U.S. Representatives were Masons, as were 30 out of 48 U.S. Senators. Between 1949-1956, eight of nine Supreme Court Justices were Masons. By 1981 only one Justice was a Mason. The Senate Congressional Record of September 9, 1987 revealed the following belonged to the Masonic Lodge: 41 members of the Federal Judiciary; half of the membership of the Senate Judiciary Committee; 18 Senators; 76 Representatives.

### **Authorities of Freemasonry**

What do Masons themselves say are the official authorities for their beliefs and practices? All Masons consider their ancient ritual to be a chief authority, as well as the Grand Lodge in each region. In addition, almost all Masons consider the following three books to be authoritative interpreters of official Masonry: (1) Coils Masonic Encyclopedia by Henry Wilson Coil; (2) The Builders by Joseph Fort Newton; (3) Mackey's Revised Encyclopedia of Freemasonry by Albert G. Mackey. The secondary literature that I have used as some of the sources of this study, quote extensively from these authors to prove their case.

### **Structure and Membership**

At the heart of the Masonic Lodge is the Blue Lodge, to which all masons must belong. The Blue Lodge consists of the first three degrees of Freemasonry: Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason. Each of these degrees includes elaborate ritual and extensive memorization that candidates are required to perform at three different meetings of the Lodge. A candidate must be accepted by all members of a Lodge. Even before earning the first degree, before he has learned anything about Masonry, the candidate is required to swear that he "will conform to all the ancient established usages of the Order" (Whalen: 45).

In each of the first three degree rituals, the candidate is blindfolded, led about the Lodge, and required to pray and swear various oaths. In addition, each ritual requires the candidate to divest himself of certain articles of clothing (shirt, shoes, pants). Normally Masons will earn each of the first three degrees, which they must do to be considered full members of the Lodge. As a candidate achieves each degree, more of the secrets are revealed to him, including the meaning of Masonic symbolism, various identifying signs and handshakes, and additional oaths. Those who have completed the three degrees of the Blue Lodge may choose to go on to either the Scottish Rite (which has an additional 29 degrees) or the York Rite (which has an additional 7 degrees).

Members are not required to attend meetings, but they are required to pay annual dues. Meetings are held weekly. Normally, an official meeting of the Lodge must have at least seven brothers present. Meetings must be held in a room without windows, and often take place on the second or third floor of a building if possible. Officials at the meetings are Worshipful Master (who runs the meetings), Treasurer, Secretary, Senior Deacon, Junior Deacon, Senior Warden, Junior Warden, Senior Steward, Junior Steward, and Tyler.

### **Is Freemasonry a religion or religious organization?**

At the heart of the Christian critique of Freemasonry is the allegation that Freemasonry is a religious organization that requires certain beliefs about God. Many Masons stridently disagree, claiming that they are merely a secular organization. But is this true? And what do authorities of the Masonic Lodge say? Webster's New World Dictionary defines religion as "(1) belief in a divine or super human power . . . to be obeyed and worshipped as the Creator and ruler of the universe; (2) expression of . . . belief in conduct and ritual." Masonry involves all facets of this definition.

First, Masonry clearly requires faith in God who is the Creator. Belief in God is considered one of Masonry's "landmarks" (articles of faith). "A belief in the existence of God is an essential point of Speculative Freemasonry--so essential, indeed that it is a landmark of the Order that no atheist can be made a Freemason. Nor is this left to an inference; for a specific declaration to that effect is demanded [of candidates] as an indispensable preparation for initiation" (Mackey: 409). This God is believed to be the Creator and Ruler of the Universe and throughout their ritual is addressed, prayed to, called, and sworn to variously as "Grand Architect of the Universe," "Father of the Universe," "Grand Warden," "Supreme Being," or merely "Almighty God."

Second, this God is regularly worshiped. Every ritual involves prayer to God and oaths that are taken in his name. And every meeting involves ritual. They refer to their lodges as temples. Every Masonic lodge has an altar in the center of the room, with a Bible or another holy book placed upon it, at which many prayers to the Great Architect are prayed. Mackey has this to say about the Masonic altar, "From all this we can see that the altar in Freemasonry is not merely a convenient article of furniture, intended like a table, to hold a Bible. It is a sacred utensil of religion, intended, like the altars of the ancient temples, for religious uses, and thus identifying Freemasonry, by its necessary existence in our lodges, as a religious institution. Its presence should also lead the contemplative Freemason to view the ceremonies in which it is employed with solemn reverence, as being part of a really religious worship" (Mackey: 56).

Because of these facts, Albert Mackey is merely stating the obvious when he writes,

On the contrary, we contend, without any sort of hesitation, that Freemasonry is, in every sense of the word except one, and that its least philosophical, an eminently religious institution--that it is indebted solely to the religious element it contains for its origin as well as its continued existence. . . . The tendency of all Freemasonry is toward religion. If it makes any progress, its progress is toward that holy end. Look at its ancient landmarks, its sublime ceremonies, its profound symbols and allegories--all inculcating religious doctrine, commanding religious observance, and teaching religious truth, and who can deny that it is eminently a religious Institution. . . . We open and close our Lodges with prayer; we invoke the presence of the Most High upon all our labors; we demand of our neophytes a profession of trusting belief in the existence and the superintending care of God; and we teach them to bow with humility and reverence at His awful name., while His holy Law is widely opened upon our altars" (Mackey: 847).

It is clear, then, that both according to the basic definition of "religion," and according to the testimony of the ritual and authoritative writings of Masonry itself, that Freemasonry is primarily a religious institution.

### **What kind of religion is Freemasonry and is it incompatible with Christianity?**

Those Freemasons who admit that Masonry is a religion, claim that their religion is compatible with, and no threat to, any other religion. They allege that it is a universal religion that accepts people of all religions, provided they believe in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. Specifically, they claim that, "there is nothing in it [Freemasonry] repugnant to the faith of a Christian" (Mackey: 847). They describe their religion as "not sectarian. . . . Its religion is that general one of nature and primitive revelation--handed down to us from some ancient and Patriarchal Priesthood, in which all men may agree and in which no men can differ" (Mackey: 847). In short, their religion requires belief in the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and the immortality of the soul/eternal life. Thus, Masons hold that Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and even Buddhists can join without sacrificing their religious beliefs in any way.

Yet questions must be asked, "Who is the God that is worshiped in the universal religion of the Masons? Is it the God of the Bible?" Mackey favorably quotes Higgins: "Be assured, that God is equally present with the pious Hindoo in the temple, the Jew in the synagogue, the Mohammedan in the mosque, and the Christian in the church" (Mackey: 409-410). In other words, Masonry teaches that their God is worshiped by all religions, the differing religions merely refer to him by different names and in different ways. This is blatant syncretism, and is patently false. It betrays an ignorance of what these religions themselves teach. Some religions are monotheistic and believe in a personal God (Christianity, Judaism, Islam), others are polytheistic (some traditions within Hinduism), or believe in an impersonal God (Brahman in Hinduism), Christians teach that the only true God is the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is a God that can be known and is accessible only through Jesus Christ, who is true God and true man. This Jesus says, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father, except by me" (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Christianity is an exclusive faith that says that only its God is the true God and all others are idols. Yahweh is not Allah. Yahweh is not Shiva. The Masonic notion of god might be compatible with Hinduism or Buddhism, as these religions tend to be eclectic and elastic in their notions of god. But the Masonic Lodge's Great Architect of the Universe cannot be compatible with the Christian concept of God.

Moreover, in its rituals, its meetings, and even in casual conversation within the Lodge, Masonry forbids its members to confess that the triune God is the only true God or to mention the name of Jesus. It rejects the deity of Christ and teaches that he was only a man on the same level as other "great" religious teachers such as Mohammed, Confucius, Zoroaster, or Buddha. Additionally, it claims that its God is superior to all sectarian gods, such as the Christian triune God.

Therefore, can a Christian in good conscience worship and pray to this god of Masonry which they claim is all gods, behind all gods, in all gods, and above all gods? Masonry worships a god that can be worshiped apart from Jesus Christ, and therefore its god is a false god.

### **Does the Masonic Lodge teach a person how to get to heaven?**

As seen above, Freemasonry claims that it in no way teaches anything repugnant to Christianity. Yet in its ritual and teaching it contradicts the central teaching of all of Christianity: the teaching that we are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus, apart from good works (Ephesians 2:8-10; Romans 3:21-28; Galatians 2:16).

For example, in the ritual for the Entered Apprentice, they regard all nonMason candidates as dwelling in darkness (including Christian candidates). Only those who become Masons are brought to the light. This totally repudiates the teaching of Jesus, the Light of the World (John 1:4-9; 8:12; 12:46), who says that all those who believe in him dwell in light and are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14-16; Eph 5:8; Col 1:12-13; 1 Peter 2:9), and all those who don't are in darkness.

The Masons also explicitly declare that entrance into the life to come is earned by their Masonic good works and purity of life. At the end of the ritual for the raising of Mason to the degree of Master Mason, the worshipful Master delivers the following charge to the assembled brothers:

And now, my brethren, let us see to it, and so regulate our lives by the plumb-line of justice, ever squaring our actions by the square of virtue, that when the Grand Warden of Heaven may call for us, we may be found ready; let us cultivate assiduously the noble tenets of our profession--brotherly love, relief, and truth--and, from the square, learn morality; from the level, equality; from the plumb, rectitude of life. Let us imitate, in all his various perfections, him who, when assailed by the murderous band of rebellious craftsmen, maintained his integrity, even in death, and sealed his pledge with his own blood [the person referred to is Hiram Abiff, who features prominently in Masonry]. . . . Thus, when dissolution draws nigh, and the cold winds of death come sighing around us, and his chilly dews already glistening on our foreheads, with joy we shall obey the summons of the Grand Warden of Heaven, and go from our labors on earth to everlasting refreshments in the Paradise of God. Then, by benefit of the pass--a pure and blameless life--with a firm reliance on Divine Providence, we shall gain ready admission into that Celestial Lodge above, where the Supreme Grand Warden forever resides--forever reigns. When, placed at his right hand, he will be pleased to pronounce us just and upright Masons, then shall we be fitted as living stones for that spiritual temple (In Whalen:75-76).

### **The Masonic funeral service teaches that:**

Masons believe sincerely that when life on earth comes to a close, the soul is translated from the imperfections of this mortal sphere, to that all-perfect, glorious and Celestial Lodge Above, where God, the Grand Architect of the Universe, presides. With these truths and convictions, our brother was well acquainted. Though perfection of character is not of this world, yet we are persuaded that our brother sought to live by these truths and principles of Masonry. . . . When our brother labored with us in Masonic attire, he wore a white apron, which he was taught is an emblem of innocence and a badge of a Mason. By it, he was constantly reminded of that purity of life and rectitude of conduct so necessary to his gaining admission into the Celestial Lodge Above. (Quoted in Ankerberg 1990:81-82).

Each of these quotes shows that the Masons teach salvation by good works, something the Bible condemns and regards as impossible. The above are quotes are representative of many more places in Masonic literature where salvation of works is put forth. Notice that faith in Jesus Christ crucified is not mentioned as the basis for our entrance into heaven. Faith in Christ is never mentioned in Masonic literature and ritual. Members are taught to rely on the good works that have done in obedience to Masonry as the means to enter the "Celestial Lodge" above. Whether they were Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, or Buddhist does not matter. All that matters is that they were faithful Masons, according to Masonic teaching. This is the exact opposite of the Bible's teaching: that God gives eternal life as a gift to those who believe that Jesus died for them. All others will be condemned because they have rejected the Gift of God's Son. (John 3:16-17).

### **Symbolism and Allegory**

Freemasonry is filled with symbolism and allegory that has been drawn from various sources. The tools of stonemasons have been given symbolic meaning which feature prominently in the Lodge ritual. For example, in the Lodge meeting room, above the throne of the worshipful Master and on the altar is the square and the compass with a "G" in the middle. The "G" stands for "Geometry" though some Masons believe it stands for "God." Many other tools and objects are infused with symbolic meaning.

The chief allegory of Masonic ritual concerns the death and resurrection of Hiram Abiff (the Builder). This Hiram (not be confused with Hiram, King of Tyre) is mentioned in 1 Kings 7. There he is described as a very gifted bronze worker, who fashioned many furnishings for Solomon's temple. The Bible says nothing more about Hiram. Yet the Masons have fashioned an elaborate allegory concerning Hiram Abiff, which forms the heart of the Master Mason degree. According to their ritual, Hiram was the chief builder of Solomon's temple and the Grand Master. Some fellow craftsmen wanted to know the secret word associated with the Master Mason's degree. When Hiram refused to give it to them, they murdered him, and buried his body in the rubbish of the temple. Hiram's body was found, and the assassins were discovered and put to death for their crime. After several attempts by others, Solomon raised Hiram from the dead. During the ritual of the Master Mason, the candidate plays the part of Hiram Abiff, is killed, then raised to life again, all the while blindfolded.

### **Masons and the Bible**

At every Lodge meeting the Bible sits open upon the altar. This gives the impression that the Masonic Lodge is a Christian organization. As has been shown above, this is anything but true. Actually, the Masons teach that the Bible is only a symbol of the Will of God, and that the contents of the Bible are not the Word of God. Moreover, according to Coil, Masons are not required to believe any part of the Bible (Quoted in Ankerberg 1989:48). In addition, any holy book of any religion can be placed on the altar, depending on the religion of the majority of the members. The Koran is placed on the altar of Muslim Lodges, for example.

### **Masonic Oaths**

In each of the first three degree ceremonies, the candidate is asked to make an oath, to swear "in the presence of Almighty God" to never reveal the secrets of the of the Masonic Order. In each oath, the candidate calls upon himself a violent death, if he ever reveals the secrets. (For example the oath for the Entered Apprentice degree says, "binding myself under no less penalty than that of having my throat cut across, my tongue torn open from its roots, and my body buried in the rough sands of the sea . . . should I ever violate this my Entered Apprentice obligation. So help me God." (Ankerberg 1990:181). Each oath ends with the words, "So help me God." It is sinful to invoke God's name or take an oath in unnecessary or frivolous matters and is a violation of the Commandment, "You shall not take God's name in vain." Jesus speaks against this in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. Those who have sworn such oaths should repent of them, and are not sinning if they break them.

### **Sources for this Study**

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*[www.orldutheran.com/html/masoniclodge.html](http://www.orldutheran.com/html/masoniclodge.html)*