



PAPER

Own Free Will And Accord Short Talk No. 99

Summary: An exploration of the phrase 'own free will and accord' by which a would-be Initiate describes his motive in asking to become a Freemason.

'...a poor candidate, who has been well and worthily recommended, regularly proposed and approved in open Lodge, and now comes of his own free will and accord, properly prepared humbly soliciting to be admitted to the mysteries and privileges of Freemasonry' - As stated in the Initiation Ceremony.

Freemasons use the word *free* in several ways: Free Mason or Freemason; freeborn, free and accepted; free will and accord. So familiar are these words and so frequently used, that few questions are ever asked about them. We are only concerned with the expression '*own free will and accord*'. This is a phrase that every Freemason knows. It is one of a number of expressions used in our ritual that is to all intent and purposes universal throughout all the English speaking Masonic world. Though when this phrase is thoughtfully considered, questions arise:

- Why is 'free will' alone not enough?
- Why is 'accord' alone not enough?
- Why does Freemasonry use 'free will and accord' as the necessary phrase by which a would-be Initiate describes his motive in asking to become a member?

Reference to the dictionary at the time that the ritual was settled in its present form describes 'Accord' as '*to adjust, unite, to agree with. A compact; harmony a union*'. The word 'Freewill' meant '*unconstrained, without care*'. Neither of these explanations is helpful in an attempt to explain the modern understanding of the origins and the intentions of the expression. Modern Masonic usage has put much more into the words than the early dictionary explains, (or may be intended). That which is done 'of my own accord' is accomplished with desire; many acts may be those of free will, which are accomplished without desire, even sometimes with distaste. Thus, faced with the choice of two evils, man chooses the lesser by his exercise of free will. What he does of his own accord is not influenced by a prospective penalty, but by a want or desire that includes a hope of some better state, some happiness, some good to come from such action. Dr. Joseph Fort Newton, Baptist Minister, and Masonic Historian defined the difference most happily, in answering the question '*Why both free will and accord?*' He said:

'Free will denotes liberty of choice, self determination; lack of restraint, while 'accord' implies wholeheartedness, free from inducement or pressure of any kind'.



Now, this is where the problem begins. Let us return to study the phraseology as it was originally contained in the ritual as it was settled in its present form. Although the matter was raised as early as 1723 by Anderson, it was shortly after the union of the two Grand Lodges that in 1815 the new Book of Constitutions proclaimed to the world forever the non-sectarian character of Freemasonry in the Charge '*Concerning God and Religion*'. It provided for Freemasons wherever dispersed to choose of their own free will and accord their own religion.

From time immemorial it has been fundamental with all religions to indoctrinate infants, long before they can think for themselves into becoming sectarian, this taking place at a time in their lives that they had no free will, and no opportunity to exercise sound judgement about such matters. In Freemasonry there is no such thing. At the entrance into the Lodge the Master asks the Candidate: '*Are you a free man and of the full age of twenty-one years?*' In other words: Are you a responsible adult fit to make sound judgement about becoming a Freemason or not? Simply put, unlike the world's religions, the Candidate for Freemasonry is given the freedom of choice. He joins having made a conscious decision as an adult of sound mind, and of his own free will and accord. It is an established fact that Freemasonry does not proselytise.

It does not seek to convert people to its dogma, it does not employ missionaries whose objective is to persuade people to follow a belief. Those who desire to partake of the mysteries and privileges of our Order must seek them of their own free will and accord. In some Constitutions the candidate's plea for entrance into a Masonic Lodge is first explained by a quotation from the Great Light:

'Ask. And it shall be given you, seek, and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.'
(Matthew 7:7-8)

Every Candidate for Freemasonry must:

ASK for himself

SEEK for himself, and

KNOCK for himself

So let us move on to the thorny subject of *Solicitation*. Let us remember the words of the Worshipful Master following the candidate's entrance into the Lodge:

'Do you seriously declare on your honour, that, unbiased by the improper solicitation of friends against your own inclination, and uninfluenced by mercenary or other unworthy motive, you freely and voluntarily offer yourself a candidate for the mysteries and privileges of Freemasonry?'

Such language certainly implies that there is such a thing as *proper* solicitation of friends. It is natural to enquire what may be the distinction between solicitation which is 'improper' and that which is 'proper'. Masonic authorities have in the past, and still do have differences of opinion on this matter. It all seems to depend upon the definition of the word solicitation. But here we have a problem since the meaning of the word has changed since the ritual was settled in its present form. Samuel Johnson's Dictionary of 1754, defines the word: '*solicitation - importunity, an entreaty*'. The word importunity was defined as '*to tease with incessant solicitation*'. The word entreaty meant '*to beg earnestly*'. Whereas the modern Chambers Dictionary uses less provocative language: Solicitation – '*An earnest request; and invitation*'. One can therefore conclude the '*Improper Solicitation*' implies '*With unreasonable force or persuasion*'.

If the original definition from 1754 is accepted then some authorities will argue that there can be no such thing as proper solicitation. If that is the case then the wording of the ritual in the Initiation Ceremony that introduces the candidate as someone who *'now comes of his own free will and accord humbly soliciting to be admitted to the mysteries and privileges of Freemasonry'*, does not make sense.

A conversation between a Mason and a very old life-long family friend, may illustrate the point. His friend said to him one day *'I know, Fred, that you are a Freemason. You never discuss it, and I know that it is a 'Secret Society'. Therefore if you intended that I should know anything about, you would have told me, if you had ever thought that I had a contribution to make you would have invited me to become a member.'*

The family friend was Sir Ernest Canning, the former Lord Mayor of Birmingham, a most successful and well respected industrialist, and much loved; a deep thinking member of Birmingham Society. Because of the concept that a man must firstly ask to become a member of our Fraternity, such a man as Sir Ernest Canning was lost.

Every member of our wonderful Fraternity will know of a personal friend or acquaintance who without doubt is 'a fit and proper person to be made a Mason' who has never understood the rules governing membership of our Order, and has never proceeded to ask to join. This means that potentially hundreds of thousands of 'Proper Persons' have been lost to our Order. This cannot be described as anything less than a tragic mistake.

We can and should make responsible representations to explain to individuals who, by their membership would substantially enhance and enrich the Brotherhood. May this approach make a favourable impact upon our membership, and may the technique of proper solicitation be passed on from generation to generation.

Postscript: *'Laws and Institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind'*. Thomas Jefferson, 1743–1826, Third President of the United States of America.

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Papers offer a simple, direct means of advancement in a particular aspect of Masonic knowledge. They can be used in a variety of ways:

- Read at home for private study
- Shared for pre-reading by members of a discussion group
- Read aloud in Lodge or Chapter, or in an LOI/COI/new members forum
 - Followed by 'any questions'
 - As a precursor to a discussion (in which case much more time is needed, possibly more than double that allocated to the paper itself)
 - Supported by audio-visual aids, if necessary

They can be delivered by a single person or split into bite-sized pieces and read by multiple presenters (in which case, the speaker(s) should have read and practiced the delivery of the paper beforehand).

*Note: All biblical passages are taken from the Authorized King James version unless otherwise specified.

If the paper is to be used to introduce a discussion, the presenter will need to have thought about the material, done a little research, and prepared some open questions to engage with the audience. Kipling's dictum can be of help in preparing open questions, which should begin with one of his 'serving men', as follows: *'I keep six honest serving men (they taught me all I knew). Their names are, What and Why and When and How and Where and Who'*. Rudyard Kipling

If used as part of an event, the paper should be advertised and promoted by way of trailers, flyers and announcements, in summonses, letters, emails, notice boards, and on social media.

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