



PAPER

Five Points

Summary: The origins of the term 'Points'.

The Five Points of Fellowship, as every Master Mason knows, contains the symbolic essence of the doctrine of the Brotherhood. But why are they called Points?

If we refer back to possibly the oldest document known about Freemasonry, The Regius Poem (or Halliwell Manuscript), there are fifteen regulations, which govern the conduct of members of the Craft. These are called 'Fifteen Points'. Written in the language of Chaucer, it says: *'The fifteen poyntys they are wroghton'* which translated into easy English reads: *'The fifteen points that are written'*. In Johnson's Dictionary of 1754, the word Point meant 'a head or chief matter'.

We can all well remember the questions posed to the candidate before passing:

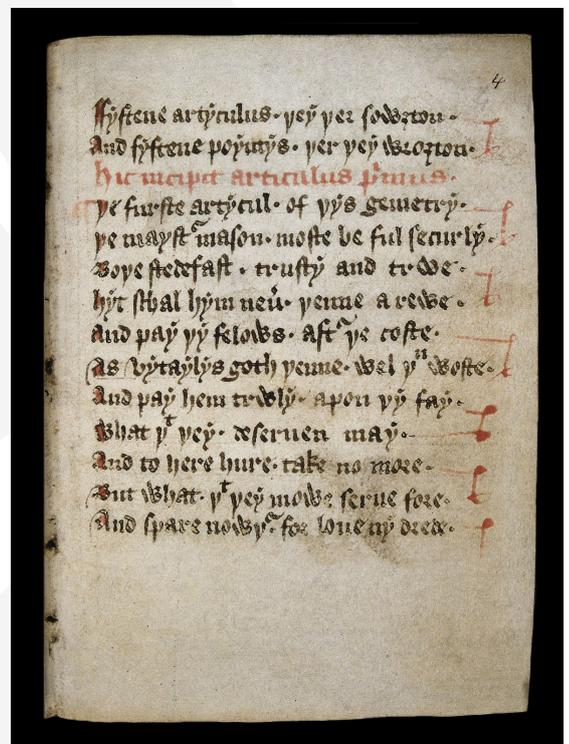
'How do you demonstrate proof of your being a Mason to others?'

To be answered,

'By signs, tokens and the perfect points of my entrance.'

Prior to the reconciliation of 1813 the wording was: *'principle points'*. Besides being known as principle points they were actually referred to in the old English lectures as *'The Twelve Original Points'*. The following passage provides an interesting explanation:

'There are in Freemasonry twelve original points, which form the basis of the system and comprehend the whole Ceremony of Initiation. Without the existence of these Points, no man ever was, or can be, legally and essentially received into the Order. Every person who is made a Mason must go through these twelve forms and Ceremonies, not only in the First Degree, but also in every subsequent one.'



A page from the Halliwell Manuscript detailing the "Fifteen Points".
Courtesy of the British Library [Public Domain]

The twelve points were:

1. Opening
2. Preparation
3. Report
4. Entrance
5. Prayer
6. Perambulation
7. Advancing
8. Obligation
9. Entrusting
10. Investiture
11. Explanation
12. Closing

Let us now return to the subject 'Five Points of Fellowship'.

Dr George Oliver, (1782–1867) sums up the meaning of 'Five Points' in his Landmarks:

- Assisting a Brother in his distress
- Supporting him in his virtuous undertakings
- Praying for his welfare
- Keeping inviolate his secrets
- Vindicating his reputation as well in his absence as in his presence

According to William Preston, from time immemorial the Five Points have been symbolised by hand, foot, knee, breast and back. Despite some curious changes in the ritual, most of us are really more concerned with a practical explanation of The Five Points as they have been taught for hundreds of years.

The study of this goes more deeply into fraternal and Brotherly relationships than at first-view the ritual indicates.

Our First Point, '*hand to hand I greet you as a Brother*'. When the necessities of a Brother call for aid, we should not be slow in stretching forth the hand of friendship and Brotherly love to render him assistance which may save him.

Our Second Point pledges us to support a Brother in all his praiseworthy undertakings and forgetting every selfish consideration we should be swift of foot and press forward in the exercise of Charity and kindness to a distressed fellow creature; whether a Freemason or not.



The meaning of the Third Point was described by Albert G. Mackey, (1807– 1881):

'A Brother when at prayer, in his devotions to Almighty God should remember a Brother's welfare as his own. Because the prayers of a fervent and sincere heart will find no less favour in the sight of heaven because the petition for self intermingles with aspirations of benevolence for a friend.'

The Fourth Point demonstrates that a Brother's lawful secrets, when entrusted to us, we should keep as our own. The keeping of our Brother's confidence has more to it than mere silence. If he confides to us a secret, we are made keepers of a trust as well as a secret. To betray him may not only make known that which he wishes hidden, but it may place him in danger. To betray a trust is not the act of a Brother. In ordinary life, an unsought trust does not carry with it, a responsibility to preserve it. In Freemasonry it does!

Lastly, we will all do well to remember Mackey's interpretation of the Fifth Point:

'While with candor and kindness we should admonish a brother of his faults, we should never revile his character behind his back but, rather, when attacked by others, support and defend it'

'Speak no ill of the dead, since they cannot defend themselves' might well have been written of the absent. In a truly Masonic sense, no Brother is absent if his Brother is present. In those circumstances he always has a champion and defender who stands upon the Fifth of the Five Points of Fellowship as solid as a rock.

Freemasonry's Brotherly love began in the close ties of our forefathers, the operative Masons. Those who cut the stones and tried and set the stones and saw a mighty Cathedral slowly rising high spires to the skies could hardly have laboured successfully together without a spirit of helpfulness. Living together, working together, planning together, and protecting each other soon made men learn to respect and care for each other. Through their early and simple ritual, it may well be that the Five-Points-of-Fellowship had its origin. This would have united them in one sincere bond of fraternal affection and served to distinguish them from strangers. This may have demonstrated to the world in general in those days that the words 'My Brother' amongst Freemasons meant something more than just a name.

Recommended use of Papers

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 and any reference to ritual will be from Emulation 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.

For further papers and other learning materials visit *Solomon* at <http://solomon.ugle.org.uk>

Acknowledgement:

UGLE gratefully acknowledges Ray Hollins as the compiler and editor of this document, which is an extract from his series of ten volumes, collectively titled 'A Daily Advancement in Masonic Knowledge' and for his permission to publish it in this form.

He wishes to acknowledge the assistance of RW Bro Richard Fletcher, Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Vermont in The United States of America, and the Masonic Service Association of North America (MSANA) who gave their permission for the use of a wealth of interesting and informative material within their publications known as 'Short Talk Bulletins' and MSANA references are made at the end of each Short Talk in full copyright acknowledgement. Each 'Short Talk' has been carefully re-written by WBro Hollins PAGDC, to provide supplementary information from a wide variety of sources used for the benefit of Freemasonry in general.

Disclaimer:

The views or interpretations contained in this document are those of the author. UGLE recognises there are many different interpretations of ritual, symbolism and history. It does not endorse the contents of this document or of any external websites linked to within the document.

Copyright:

All rights reserved. No part of this document may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission from The United Grand Lodge of England in writing.