



PAPER

What is Freemasonry? According to Fred & Charlie



Summary: Fred and Charlie discuss the true meaning of Freemasonry in the context of the coronavirus pandemic.

Fred's wife called him in from the garden; Charlie was on the line. Something told her it would be a long phone call and she was absolutely right, Charlie wanted to chat. Coronavirus having arrived, the usual Masonic links were now the weekly phone call or the Lodge Secretary's eNews.

Charlie's first words were: *'Fred, anything I can do? Any shopping?'*

He knew Fred's wife was rather ill and so for the next twelve weeks Fred wouldn't risk any infection by leaving the house to shop. Charlie recognised it was a golden opportunity for Masons to step up to the plate and demonstrate what Brotherhood was really all about.

Charlie's offers of shopping were gratefully accepted and a list promised for the next day. Duty done, Charlie succumbed to some idle gossip.

'There's talk of the virus continuing for many months, Fred. Some members may die, others resign, and some just stop coming to Lodge. Do you think Freemasonry can survive?'

Fred sipped a proffered coffee; his wife knew how long Charlie's phone calls could take!

'Over the past three hundred years, Charlie, Freemasonry has survived much worse, an attempted revolution and brutal suppression in the 18th century; the fractious amalgamation of the Antients and Moderns in the 19th century; and two World Wars in the 20th century. It has survived them all, and in fact grown more vigorously after each.'

'Why, Fred? What made Masonry rebound like that?'

'Let me try to explain, Charlie.'

Hearing this, Fred's wife refilled the cup and added a plate of chocolate digestives; she knew the signs!

'A year or so ago, I sat in the Temple at Great Queen Street with about 2000 other Masons. Apparently, the many distinguished visitors included judges and bishops, academics and accountants; in short, men of every profession, trade and business. They'd travelled from as far as Malaya and Borneo in the East, from the Caribbean and Eastern Canada in the West, and from India and Africa too; furthermore, most had come at their own expense. Looking around this rather relaxed and very amiable assembly one question kept coming to mind, what on earth was it about Freemasonry that made all the effort and expense of their long journeys here so worthwhile? How did, how does, Freemasonry inspire such commitment to overcome all those hurdles along the way?'

Charlie broke in.

'Did you come up with an answer?'

'Well at one level, Charlie, we offer great friendship out of the Lodge, and good-humoured conviviality within it. For many it provides a relaxing company after the stresses of the working week. There's also a comforting sense of well-being; a feeling of easy acceptance for simply being who we are, rich or poor, young or old.'

'Many organisations claim that, Fred', said Charlie, 'and they raise huge sums for charity as well; the Rotary, Lions, Buffalo, Caribou etc. all come to mind. What do you reckon makes the Freemasons so different?'

Fred munched another biscuit, gathering his thoughts.

'Could it be that these other bodies have largely ended up as fund raising social clubs where the emphasis is on the club and how much it raises, not on people within it?'

'Freemasonry however starts and ends with the Mason, the Lodge is merely his location. It's much deeper than those others. We offer him a world-wide system of morality with principles that are clear and unwavering, allied with charity towards others, and the courage to remain true to those principles.'

Charlie mused.

'Not all see it that way, do they? Some of the younger Masons simply look forward to dressing up, white shirt - dark suit, for a monthly dinner which is a nice blend of formality and a cheerful banter. It makes a pleasant change from a hurried meal in casual clothes. We like that bit of formality and ceremonial. It makes us who we are.'



Fred laughed.

'You could also say that our three hundred years of history makes Masons who we are. Our traditions are of long-standing and for many Masons that's important too. They remind us of that system of morality. Many are inspired by the historical stories and even have links with the tools used by the old operative masons. So, we can take great pride belonging to this 300 and more years of historical tradition.'

'What makes you so confident that'll help us survive the coronavirus, Fred?'

'At heart, Charlie, while Rotary and the others can raise oodles of money, our Masonic morality tells us that true charity comes from the heart, not the wallet. In the middle of a pandemic, it is not a raffle or wodge of ten pound notes that matters to people; it is the welcome voice on the phone, the cheery email, the kindly offer of shopping or collecting the medicine. In Freemasonry, Charlie, it is always people, not money, that matters most. That's the belief that helps Freemasonry survive every crisis.'



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).

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

*Note: All biblical passages are taken from the Authorized King James version and any reference to ritual will be from Emulation unless otherwise specified.

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Fred and Charlie character drawings courtesy of Eddie Wildman.

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