

## MMM DEGREE – CHARITY

Brethren, there is one characteristic of the Mark Master Mason degree which has a continuous thread throughout all of Freemasonry, and that is 'charity'. I would like to look at charity from three aspects; Our Masonic ritual as it relates to charity in the Entered Apprentice and the Mark Master Mason degrees; The apostle Paul's letter to the Corinthians; and The Christian theologian and preacher John Wesley in a sermon addressing St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

First of all, the Oxford dictionary defines Charity as; An organization set up to help people in need, (Today we think of registered charities); The giving of money or other help to people in need, (Monetary donations); and Kindness and understanding shown when judging other people.

It is the 3<sup>rd</sup> aspect of this definition which is most interesting: "kindness and understanding shown when judging other people".

In Freemasonry, the candidate is first introduced to Charity in the lecture in the NE corner in the EA degree. Here his principles are put to the test, by calling upon him to exercise that virtue which may justly be denominated the distinguishing characteristics of a ...'s heart. It should be noted that in this instance the call for Charity is on behalf of the brethren of the craft who are daily sinking into the sere and yellow leaf of old age; and who are being reduced to the lowest depths of poverty and distress.

Later in the JW's lecture the candidate is instructed that a M...'s charity should know no bounds, save those of prudence, and is informed of three principal virtues: Faith, Hope and Charity; Faith in the G.A.O.T.U, Hope in salvation, and Charity toward all men. Here the application of Charity is expanded beyond the brethren of the craft.

In the Mark Master Mason degree we have a similar lesson presented in a similar manner, but with this difference, that to save the candidate from being humiliated and to enable him to fulfill his pledge, his brethren come to his assistance. In the EA degree, it was that embarrassment that taught the lesson. In the MMM degree it is the kindness of the brethren and their eagerness to live up to their obligation that makes a deep and lasting impression. Unfortunately, in both of these degrees, Charity is of a material application and although the ritual provides a lasting impression on the candidate, it provides little explanation to the full meaning of this virtue.

The word 'Charity' derives from the Latin word "carus" meaning "dear or well-beloved". Its proper meaning is 'love', the universal love for all mankind, springing from the Fatherhood of God and His love for all His creatures.

St. Paul expressed this sentiment in his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 13:1-3): "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have *the gift of prophecy*, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing".

The question arises: what definition of Charity is St. Paul speaking of? The Christian theologian and preacher, John Wesley, addresses this in his sermon on Charity. To better understand John Wesley's interpretation of this scripture, it's important to understand the economic and social dynamics at this period in history in Britain. The following demographic statistics are for early-to-mid eighteenth-century Britain for the City of London: Three-quarters of all children died before age of five. While irreversible disease accounted for a large percentage of the fatalities, the most callous neglect and not to say willful cruelty were also seen. The monies paid to the Parish to care for resourceless children were commandeered by authorities and used to treat themselves to a large-scale drunk. By 1750 Britain distilled eleven million gallons of spirits, for a total population of only five million people. Of the two thousand houses in St. Giles, London, 506 or ¼ of them were gin shops.

John Wesley preached against big business and the gin trade. To commemorate this historical period, alcohol is not used during communion in most Methodist-related churches today. In one of John Wesley's sermons he expressed regret that the word Charity had not been correctly translated as "Love" instead of "Charity", so that the apostolic triad of virtues would have been not "Faith", "Hope" and "Charity", but "Faith", "Hope" and "Love". In this sermon he concluded "but what kind of love is that whereof the Apostle is speaking throughout the chapter? Many persons of eminent learning and piety apprehend that it is the love of God. But from reading the whole chapter numberless times, and considering it in every light, I am thoroughly persuaded that what St. Paul is here directly speaking of is the love of our neighbour".

Therefore, as Masons we could conclude that to be in possession of the virtue Charity, the true Mason should be faithful to the EA degree charge relating to the duties we owe to our neighbor: by acting with him on the square, by rendering to him every kind office that justice or mercy may require, by relieving his distress, by soothing his afflictions, and by doing unto him as in similar cases you would wish he would do unto you.

I would suggest to the candidate that he also pay particular attention to the Mark Master Mason degree, as far as it relates to Charity – here he may receive a plainly defined higher and nobler type of charity than he has so far encountered.

Brethren may we love and cherish our neighbors who reside with us in this celestial world below so that our charity will stand the test of the Grand Overseer's square and our work will not be rejected and thrown aside.

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Sources:  
John Wesley, Christian Theologist  
Volume of the Sacred Law  
Oxford Concise Dictionary