

BUILD BRIDGES - NOT WALLS

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You have all seen pictures of the famous “leaning Tower of Pisa.” You know it leans precariously many degrees from the perpendicular. A tourist, seeing the Tower for the first time, was not impressed. He grumbled, “that looks like the work of the same contractor who built my garage!”

Masons are builders! In fact, a famous Mason named Joseph Fort Newton wrote a book about our Craft called “The Builders”. Newton claims that the world has benefited greatly because of the Masonic ideals of liberty, fraternity and equality.” These ideals have helped us build the Worlds greatest Fraternity of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth.

In building this great Fraternity we have constructed bridges which have helped the ordinary man, who has made the decision to join us, cross over and become immersed in these ideals which have indeed made him a better man, to himself, his family and his community.

All Freemasons know that we trace our traditional origins to the ancient craftsmen who participated in the building of King Solomon’s Temple. Most also realize that the forerunners of modern Masonic Lodges were the medieval lodges of devout craftsmen.

Today we like to say we are no longer “operative masons.” We are “speculative Masons” which means we do not build physical buildings or other structures, our building task is symbolic. We build character. We build good men. We build just and honorable relationships. We build brotherhood.

Let us put it this way - good Masons do not build walls or fences. Our work is not to separate or divide people. Our fraternity ought never to isolate or alienate human beings from each other. We should be looking at knocking walls down, rather than putting them up.

Masons do not wall out men because of creed or physical characteristics. We have never excluded people on the basis of strict doctrinal standards. Ours is an inclusive brotherhood which welcomes Jews, Christians, Moslems, and

persons of other religions. We only ask for a basic belief in God and a dedication to moral living. We welcome all men who intend to build their lives and their relationships according to the compass of virtue, the plumb line of morality, and the square of ethics.

Before I would consider building a wall I'd ask myself what I was walling in or walling out, and who was I going to offend."

Masons do not build walls. We build bridges. Bridges connect. Walls divide. Bridges enhance communication. Walls obstruct communication. Bridges promote friendship. Walls cause isolation. Webster defines a bridge as:

"any structure—raised to afford convenient passage over river, railroad, ravine or any other obstacle. "

We as Masons build bridges of understanding. We connect people by brotherhood. We construct passageways of friendship between persons who may differ in Church or language or race. We build tolerance as a conveyance that brings human beings together. Building bridges of friendship is at the heart of Masonry.

People, like islands, need bridges - a way to cross over, to speak, to reach, to see, over all that silent water. It is the only way. Because people aren't people, not real people, with-out that bridge; and the only action, the only REAL action, takes place on the bridge between people. So if I wait, you wait, everyone waits; when I don't start, you don't start. Nobody arrives. No builders, no bridges. The meaning of the world doesn't change; it always stays the same - same hopes, same challenges, same tragedies, same fears and victories. What does change is my and your involvement with it - our awareness, our understanding, our growth. And growth is only a deepening of what passes between you and me, on the bridge.

What could be better than to be a builder of bridges between persons and groups? What could be a better way to be remembered when we are gone? Would we not like people to say of us "He was a builder of bridges"?! Can you think of a more noble cause? Can you imagine anything truer to the purposes of Freemasonry? In his book, "The Builders," Joseph Fort Newton suggests a challenge with which I would like to leave you. He tells us the mission of Masonry is "to form mankind into a great redemptive brotherhood" He capsulizes the spirit of Masonry by daring us "to be friends

with all men; however they may differ from us in creed, or conditions; to fill every human relationship with the spirit of friendship.”

So my brethren let us take time to be a builder of bridges. Let us welcome those who make the choice to cross those bridges and join this wonderful Fraternity. Let us help them to open their eyes and hearts to the wonderful gifts that Freemasonry will give them and by doing so they and we will become “Better Men.”

Thank you my brethren for your attention.

R.W. Bro. John K. Johnston