

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE CHARGE AFTER INVESTITURE

An Address presented by Bro Malcolm Stuart, MM, to the Hawke's Bay Research Lodge No 305 on 7th February 2011

This lecture is about asking a question, looking for the answer and finding answers with certainty, perhaps, more questions. The reason for this is because ours is a living language, subject to the vagaries of time and place; and it is not always easy to understand interactions between people today let alone accurately interpret historical meanings or intentions and place them in a modern context.

There are three charges after investiture, one in each degree. In the first-degree charge we are told that we have an obligation to ensure that the harmony and peace of the lodge are not disturbed by personal enmity with another Brother, and we are taught what we must do if we couldn't resolve the differences. Yet it does far more than this. Freemasonry is not about the obvious.

The charge starts - *Let me add to the remarks of the Senior Warden*. This charge, like many others, does not stand in isolation, its context, and therefore part of its meaning, is to be found in the preceding charge where it states *the Badge of Innocence and the Bond of Friendship*. It goes on to say, *with pleasure to yourself, with usefulness to the craft, and with honour to the Lodge*.

Given this, it therefore follows *that you are never to put on that Badge and enter a Lodge in which there is a Brother with whom you are at variance, or against whom you entertain feelings of animosity* Why is this so? Surely we work with many people under just those circumstances?

Well, in normal life we do, and we have all experienced the results, for good or ill, a loss of enjoyment and reduction of productivity, being the least. This however is not normal life and we are then told what to do and why.

In such a case it is expected that you will invite him to withdraw, in order to settle your differences amicably, which having been happily effected, you may then clothe yourselves, and enter the Lodge, and work with that love and harmony, which should always characterise Freemasons.

We are told to discuss our differences and find solution, or at least understanding, so that we can work together in *love and harmony*. Therefore without the niggles, or resentments, which would hitherto occur. Why? Because of our *Bond of Friendship*! This is almost unconditional and the condition is, that we are Freemasons. Otherwise all of the "normal" conditions that we apply to our friendships, in theory do not exist.

Such as work, income, religion, politics, sport, family - things that cause us to prejudge another and therefore cause us to preclude them without knowing them.

The next part I personally have always struggled with, because it creates a dilemma. If, however, *your differences are of such a nature as not to be so easily adjusted, it were better that one or both of you should retire than that the harmony of the Lodge be disturbed by your presence*.

According to this, the honourable thing to do is retire. Does this mean that the dishonourable thing to do is stay? In which case who is left? How do we find resolution in this modern world where the meaning and import of words and therefore the ideas and ideals contained within them have been so skewed.

Perhaps the second-degree charge tells us. For there we are told we have an obligation to extend our studies in the Liberal Arts and Sciences. This is reinforced in the Charge in the South East. Why? So that *you may the better be enabled to discharge your duty as a Freemason, and estimate the wondrous works of the Almighty Creator*.

What are the Liberal Arts and Sciences and what do they teach us? The Liberal Arts are Literature, Languages, Philosophy, History and Mathematics. The Sciences are Physics, Chemistry and Biology. So one teaches us about the metaphysical world, the world of ideas and knowledge, and the other the physical world in which we live.

What are our duties as Freemasons? One is to be a man of honour, to be a fit and proper member of society and to following the principles of the craft, which include secrecy, fidelity, integrity, benevolence, and fellowship.

We are pledged to never discuss religion and politics. Yet we are urged to study literature, languages, philosophy, history, mathematics and the sciences. Ethics and morality are contained in these, and this is the way to learn to be honourable men.

To learn and become enlightened, through literature, languages, philosophy and history, lest we forget, we are told to estimate the wondrous works of the Almighty Creator, to have a look at the world and, by implication, treat it with the same reverence and humility as we would its creator.

The third-degree charge tells us to remember our position and *those great duties you have just solemnly engaged yourself to observe*. What are they?

Well one is that we have an obligation *to afford assistance and instruction to your Brethren in inferior degrees*. The rest include, the principles of secrecy, fidelity, integrity, benevolence and fellowship; and of harmony, charity, equality and justice; of education of ourselves and of others; and of honour.

We are told that Freemasonry is a progressive science, meaning that we learn and grow, as Freemasons and as Men.

In the first-degree charge there is an assumption that we have been raised by our parents, and the world around us, to be just and upright men and, therefore, honourable.

The second-degree tells us that this is not enough. That we must continue to study and learn; that it is, in fact, our duty; and that enlightenment is a continuing process. It tells us we have an obligation to learn about who we are and how we came to be here, to understand the world around us and to work in harmony with it to honour the Almighty's creation.

The third-degree says to remember these things: remember them and pass them on. Remember your past, your successes and failures so that you may aid and teach others with Honour and Humility.