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Can I be a Christian *and* a Freemason?



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I have felt constrained to write this paper as a means of organising my thoughts around the issue. It is thus a purely personal view on the question as to whether one can be both a professing Christian and an active Freemason.

There are other considerations, too. The love of my life hates Freemasons, and despises the Craft, labelling it a religion and sexist amongst other things.

I had to examine my conscience, as well as her accusations, to see if I belonged in Freemasonry at all:

Problem #1: Freemasons tend not to respond to the charges and accusations levelled against their Order:

The most startling thing about this debate is its one-sidedness. Freemasons simply don't respond to attacks. I discovered that this is partly because of a long tradition of silence; but this tradition has only served to inflame the critics even more.

Freemasons, whenever attacks come to their attention, have maintained (in their view) a dignified silence. Very often, this silence is also motivated by an attitude of indifference: We've

heard that one before. It will die out like it did the last time.

But there is another good reason for Freemasonry's silence: as a non-Sectarian movement, we



actually forbid all talk of religion (and politics) at our meetings. We are only too aware that those two topics are the most divisive by far, and do bring disunity wherever they are allowed to arise. We are however dedicated to bringing harmony between all Men, and though we encourage members to hold own views and to follow our individual consciences, we avoid bringing those stands of conscience into Lodge and thus causing disharmony between Brethren.

So, any Mason talking about his own faith is sailing very close to the wind.

One additional reason now comes to the fore. In the form of Christian Belief in which I grew up, I was led to admire those early Church Fathers, like Irenaeus, who rolled up their sleeves and mixed it with the anti-Christians of their day.

They created a genre of Christian writing and preaching called polemics, from the Greek word for war.

Going to war for the Faith sounds very romantic and brave, but, as I have grown older, I have learned that it is a tight-rope. When you go to war for your Faith, you can possibly forget your humility, meekness and the self-discipline of reflecting the nature of your Saviour. You risk becoming a noisy demagogue who doesn't seek that sinners might turn from their wickedness and live. Many of the modern polemicists who have been successful in fighting for the Faith have missed the mark somewhat. They come across as intolerant, arrogant and the very opposite of spiritual. They create a picture of a God who is also intolerant and forbidding. Above all, they present a Faith that is anti a lot of things, but they never get around to saying what they are for.

If I were to champion Freemasonry in that way, I'd do a lot more harm than good and besides, such conduct is considered totally UnMasonic.

We have to respect every other person's genuinely held beliefs. We want to live out our Masonic (and especially Christian lives) according to the Beatitudes, and according to a Masonic calling to service of our fellow Man.



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However galling it sometimes may be to turn the other cheek to untrue and childish accusations, I simply wont attack the critics. My aim here is simply to explain (mostly to myself) why I am a Christian and a Freemason.



But why ride this old hobby horse?

The series of skirmishes between organised religion and Freemasonry has gone on for a long time (since the eighteenth century), with Papal Bulls, Church-sponsored official bans, and more. But every thinking person that considers joining Freemasonry has to face arguments for himself.

When I first considered applying to be initiated as a Freemason, I had to think long and hard about this issue and I regularly revisit it as I take stock of my life.

First, a word about my belief-background:

I had been brought up an Anglican (and still love the Book of Common Prayer as a document of deep and simple spiritual value). As a student, I became involved with Fundamentalists, Conservative Evangelicals and Pentecostals. Their doctrinal stance still informs my values and outlook on life; but those Believers have always been associated with a hostile stance on Freemasonry.

More recently, though, I have become disillusioned with, in particular, the materialistic and flashy tone that the Charismatic movement has brought to the Non-Conformist sector of the Faith. It seems that the main point of Christianity is being lost amongst

the pizzazz. With their increasing stridency and militancy, they appear to be using their Bibles less, and their emotions more.

So, when it came to the decision to become a Freemason, I had to face my conscience. I had to accept that I was acting in violation of what I had been taught as a young Christian and then justify that action. This paper maps out that process.

The credibility of the protagonists

As I said above, Freemasons tend to stay silent, and the critics are very vocal. As a result, the debate has generated far more heat than light. This is largely because what has been offered as fact is usually just opinion.

Those who are anti-Freemasonry have never been Freemasons, and speak with great authority on those things they have never experienced or seen first-hand. Their quotations of Masonic ritual are taken out of context and highly selectively, not to illustrate the doctrinal flaws in the Craft, but to support their prejudged standpoint.

This is bad logic: to reach a conclusion, and only then to look for evidence to support it.

To make matters worse, when a Freemason is reborn as a Christian, he almost always renounces the Craft as an act of repentance. The anti-Masons take this as proof that Freemasonry cannot be compatible with Faith; that it is ungodly or even satanic.

Again, this is a logical fallacy. There is no single form of Freemasonry: we each join for our own reasons, and follow our own paths. The reborn converts will readily confess that whilst they were Masons, they werent Christians. That will therefore be perfectly true for them as individuals, but doesnt hold for all Freema-

sons. You cant argue from the particular to the general; logic doesnt work that way. Whatever wrong there was, would have been in the heart of the individual, not in the system known as Freemasonry.

There are, however Believers who have not left the Craft. They tend not to speak out, because aggressive polemical outbursts are considered to be both unchristian, and unMasonic.

But when four different Freemasons, independently of one another, and on separate occasions, have told me that Freemasonry brought them from a backslidden state to a new awareness and true faith in their Lord Jesus Christ, I took note.

I should state here that this paper is not intended to be theologically definitive. It is personal, and written from the only perspective that I have my own life, experience and belief.

I have come to the conclusion that Freemasonry is not only compatible with Christian Belief, but a most valuable vehicle through which to grow in the Grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Belief and the underlying presupposition of Freemasonry

I was taught that your rebirth as a Christian was only the beginning of your life in Christ. Thereafter, it was your obligation to learn, obey, grow in faith, and to become a transformed human being. Whereas certain changes happen immediately, others happen as a growth process: forgiveness of sin and the release from all that guilt being an example of the former, becoming a wise Christian being an example of the latter.

This might seem to be a contradiction of the central discovery of the Reformation, but it is Scripturally sound: Phillipians 2:12 was

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drummed into my soul. Wherefore my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. i.e., now that you're saved, live accordingly.

Moreover, James sets out the balance between faith and works thus in his letter, chapter 2, verses 14-20: [verse 18ff.] Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works; show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well. The demons also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know Oh vain man, that faith without works is dead?

Freemasonry's central presupposition is that every candidate for initiation has already had an initial religious experience, and that he is asking for admission to the Order in order to assist himself in his growth in his own beliefs exactly as I was taught by my mentors.

This is something not recognised by Freemasonry's critics.

Aside: Those self-same critics have, over the years, become so focussed on preaching salvation that they have lost focus on the other aspect: living for Christ. I can remember some especially vitriolic comments when one Christian said to another that driving in an illegal manner was unchristian. The reply was an attack, demanding to know why the former Christian was being judgmental and pharisaical.

On another occasion he said: I'm waiting for the Lord to convict me

that it is wrong.

Excerpts from Masonic ritual that appeased my conscience

When I took the plunge and asked to become a Freemason, I was extremely nervous on initiation night: hypersensitive and especially on the lookout for anything that might contradict what I had been taught as a Christian. I was relieved and edified by what I observed:

Seek and ye shall find:

Freemasonry uses a very old but highly effective method of teaching its principles: acting out. The words of Jesus, referring to Mans search for the Holy Spirit are acted out in the lodge as part of initiation, as an allegory of Mans search for Truth.

The wording, in both Matthew 77 and Luke 119 is in the order: Ask and it shall be given you; seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.

Within the lodge room, the Scriptural principle is also acted out in, although in a different order: as is explained later in the ceremony, you began to seek Truth with your heart, leading to your preparation for initiation. Then someone knocks on the door on your behalf, and it is opened to you. Finally, after being led around in your blindfolded state (another symbolic enactment) you are ultimately asked: Mr _____, having been kept for some considerable time in a state of darkness, what is now the most earnest desire of your heart? You answer by asking to see light. It is, of course given to you.

The walk of faith

You enact another Scriptural principle when you first enter the lodge room. Firstly, after a prayer, the Master of the Lodge asks you: Mr _____, in all cases of difficulty and danger, in whom do you put your trust?

Candidates normally have no difficulty in answering correctly: In God.

Having made this statement of your faith in the presence of unseen witnesses, you are then told to put it to the test: you may safely arise and follow your guide with firm but humble confidence, for where the name of God is invoked, we trust no danger can ensue.

You walk around this strange room, led by someone you don't know, to another part of the room, with which you are unfamiliar. This is an extended metaphor for trust and obey. In some Masonic jurisdictions, the metaphor is further extended by placing obstacles in the candidates path for him to navigate by trustingly following his guide stones for the rocky paths, and so on.

The symbolism is obvious to any evangelical Christian. The acted-out lesson of trusting in God becomes indelibly imprinted on your soul.

Coming to the Light

This is another metaphor. When you ask to be restored to the Light, the blindfold is removed, and your head is gently held downward, so that the first thing you see is the Bible, open at Psalm 133 verse 1. The second thing you see is the Square & Compasses, lying on the page.

You are told that these are the three great, though symbolical lights in Freemasonry. I have read the accusation that this Light is a reference to Lucifer, or Satan, but it is simply a reference to Psalm 119:105: Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. The Word of God is the Primary and Great light in Freemasonry.

There is also, in that metaphor, an implicit reference to Jesus Christ for those with eyes to see. John 14-5 says: In Him was life; and the

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life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness overcame it not.

The explanation of the Tracing Board

At some part of the ceremony, the candidate is brought before a collage of a picture, showing many of the symbols used in Freemasonry. The use of symbols is for teaching purposes, as well as an act of obedience to the Commandment about graven images.

These symbols are explained in a lecture entitled the explanation of the tracing board. The priorities of Freemasonry are communicated thus.

Early in the lecture, the candidate is told why Freemasons lodges stand on Holy Ground. Three incidents from Scripture are used, the first being that of Abraham, the father of those that believe. Reference is made to the near sacrifice of Isaac.

Later on, mention is made of the same heroes of the Faith who are celebrated in Hebrews 11: Abel, Enoch, Noah and finally, Jacob. The order used in the lecture is the same as that used in that passage.

Amongst many other stories taken from Scripture, there is a reference to Jacobs ladder. In the picture, and in Masonic imagery, this ladder is depicted as being supported by the open Bible.

In the explanation, the candidate is told that this ladder consists of as many staves or rounds as comprise the moral virtues, but three are principal ones namely Faith, Hope and Charity. Faith in the Great Architect of the Universe; Hope in salvation; and Charity towards all men. This ladder rests on the volume of the sacred lore, because by the doctrines contained in that holy Book, we are taught to believe in the wise dispensations of Divine providence;

which belief strengthens our faith and enables us to ascend the first step.

The intention is very clear: faith is non-negotiable as the start of a candidates climb up the ladder of virtues: because we believe, we learn to do right.

Finally:

The last part of the ceremony of initiation is a series of charges concerning the kind of conduct expected of a Freemason. The Bible occupies a central role here: As a Freemason, I would first recommend to your most serious contemplation, the Volume of the Sacred Lore, charging you to consider it as the unerring standard of truth and justice.

You cant put it better than that.

Heresies and false gods?

A lot of the accusations against Freemasonry refer to heresy, false religion and even Satanism. Someone serious about his Faith has to take these seriously, and deal with each one prayerfully:

Freemasonry is a religion

By implication, it is meant that Freemasonry is a false religion, and therefore hostile to the Christian Faith.

From what Ive said above, it is clear that the God of Freemasonry is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. There is nothing whatever which can be construed as subversive of faith in Him. The way ceremonies are structured allows me to worship Him as I always have alongside my Jewish, Catholic, Buddhist and other brethren (who will honour God as they see fit).

That last statement would raise more than a few eyebrows, but whatever religious activities take place in a Lodge are no different in purpose than a typical school assembly, where the day begins with a reading, a prayer and a hymn and all pupils are required to be pre-

sent.

The Light

As I said above, the Light is the light of Gods word. There is however an accusation that the Light refers to Lucifer (Light-bearer) a title for Satan. This accusation first saw the light of day in an exposé of Freemasonry published in 1894. It was written by Leo Taxil (nom de plume), and published in *La femme et lenfant dans la Franc Maçonnerie Universelle*.

This text falsely attributes a statement to Albert Pike that the true religion of Freemasonry is that of Lucifer, a fact hidden from those of lower degree. This is a complete lie. In fact, as the ritual books clearly show, the higher up in the degrees you progress, the more strongly Trinitarian Christian Freemasonry becomes.

Pike was a staunch Trinitarian Christian. He never said what was attributed to him, and Taxil himself confessed his fraud in 1897, whereupon his publisher disassociated himself from him.

Taxils lie was caused by a twisting of scripture. To modern man, Lucifer can only refer to one person, and that Latin tag was given to the Fallen One in Isaiah 147 (KJV). The Hebrew in the original is the term used for the morning star.

But the genuine article is Jesus himself, who in Revelation 22:16 says: I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify to unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.

GAOTU

I have read that GAOTU, or Great Architect of the Universe is the name that Masons give to their false god.

There are good reasons for not attaching Judaeo-Christian appellation to the Divinity and His Word,



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but that term for God was first coined by Calvin.

Faith vs. Works

This accusation has been shown to be false above. Nowhere in Freemasonry do Good Works take precedence over Faith, nor are they proposed as a means of earning Gods favour.

Swearing oaths

Christs warning about swearing oaths (Let your yea be your yea) is used against Freemasonry. Reference is also made to blood oaths. I can categorically state that I have never taken an oath in Freemasonry, much less sworn to permit disembowelment, etc.

We take Obligations, not oaths, in which we voluntarily bind ourselves by our own words. At no time are we asked to swear by anything in heaven or earth exactly in accordance with Christs warning. When we utter the Lords name, it is only as a simple prayer that He help us to remain steadfast in our solemn undertaking.

Secrecy

Another accusation: I was once told that Freemasonry is offensive to God because of our secrets, for, as Jesus said: What is whispered in secret will be shouted from the rooftops.

The quotation is taken out of context. Jesus was referring to the Last Judgement, where all malicious secrets and conspiracies will be laid bare for the entire Creation to see.

I wont be ashamed of the secrets of Freemasonry. They are honest and simple: our passwords and signs of recognition. The Lord is most welcome to expose them on the Last Day: we wont need them anymore then.

As for exactly what it is that we keep secret, that is very simple, and, compared with all the rest of Freemasonry, very trivial. We

keep secret those little actions and words by which we reveal to one another that we are Brothers in the Craft.

Unequal yoking

Paul gives a warning to Believers not to be unequally yoked with the Unbeliever. This is used against Freemasons, as we are a Fraternity that welcomes all men of goodwill, regardless of colour or creed.

The context of that warning is marriage. Paul warns Believers not to marry non-believers. There is no such contract between brother Freemasons; we are a free association.

But if we are going to apply Pauls warning to all other relationships, then any Christian employed by a non-Christian in a binding contract of employment is also violating Scripture (this is reductio ad absurdum).

Masonry is a form of Witchcraft, and therefore Satanic.

The basis for this argument was that Freemasonry is called The Craft. This has never been verbal shorthand for Witchcraft, but rather because Freemasonry is based on an extended metaphor that of building a Holy Temple. This metaphor covers most of Scripture, but has its culmination in the thought behind I Peter 25ff. Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Builders of a physical, material temple are actual craftsmen, such as Bezaleel and the son of the widow of Naphtali; builders of a spiritual temple not made with hands are thus also called craftsmen. The whole intention of the metaphor is to give weight to the very clear Scriptural message about growth in Grace and working out your salvation.

So Craft Freemasonry is Scriptural.

This, of course, begs the question: Why does it need all the symbolism and extended metaphors, when the doctrines are clearly laid out in Scripture for all to read and to follow?

Now that is a worthy and constructive question. Ive no doubt that someone with a background in Psychology could do a better analysis than me. I have found, however, that the teachings of Scripture become lastingly imprinted when they are acted out. And becoming the kind of person who reflects (whether by imprinting or not) the nature of his Saviour is the intention of the Walk of Faith subsequent to conversion.

So. Can I be a Christian and a Freemason?

The answer, for me, is an emphatic yes.

For a long time, I was aware that there was a disjuncture between my professed Faith in Jesus Christ, and my daily walk: the Walk did not reflect the Talk.

Of course, I heard many sermons and Bible Studies on the fact that there is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus: [1]. These sermons, in pushing the idea of freedom from guilt, created other strange ideas, which can be summarised as: Now that Im no longer under condemnation, and a new creature to boot, nothing that I do can possibly be sinful:

That didnt work for me then, and never will. For me, Salvation is an act of Gods Grace which I accepted by faith. It was a once-off event, like a resurrection. Thereafter, I believe that I need to learn to live up to my redemption: to take his yoke upon me and learn of Him.

Any method that facilitates that process is OK by me.

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