

# Masonic Questions and Answers

by Paul M. Bessel

Masonic Questions and Answers

A Cornerstone Book  
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## Introduction

When George H. Chapin was in the Grand Line in Virginia he selected a committee to assist him to prepare a series of three booklets that would be used for candidate instruction. George felt the old method of having candidates memorize catechisms might not be the most effective way to teach new Masons what Freemasonry is all about.

He proposed a new system of candidate proficiency that includes (a) memorization of the parts of the catechism dealing with Masonic due guards, signs, words, and tokens, (b) detailed study and explanation, in the candidates' own words, of the meaning of the Masonic obligations, and (c) working with coaches in reading and discussing booklets with Masonic questions and answers appropriate for Entered Apprentices, Fellowcrafts, and Master Masons.

This last requirement was intended to be as intensive and probably as time consuming as the old catechism memorization. The purpose. The purpose was to spend this time with a coach, bonding just as much as in the old system but with the candidate and coach discussing each of the questions and answers and using them to launch into further discussions of Masonry and the Lodge into which the candidate was entering.

The three booklets with questions and answers were well received and have been used even in Lodges that decided to continue to use the old long memorization system.

When Michael Poll, the owner of Cornerstone Book Publishers, spoke with me about the need for a book that would help new Masons learn basic information about Freemasonry I thought of how the three Virginia booklets could be adapted for this purpose. The current Grand Master of Virginia, John R. Quinley, was kind

enough to give his approval, and the result is the *Masonic Questions and Answers* you will find following this introduction.

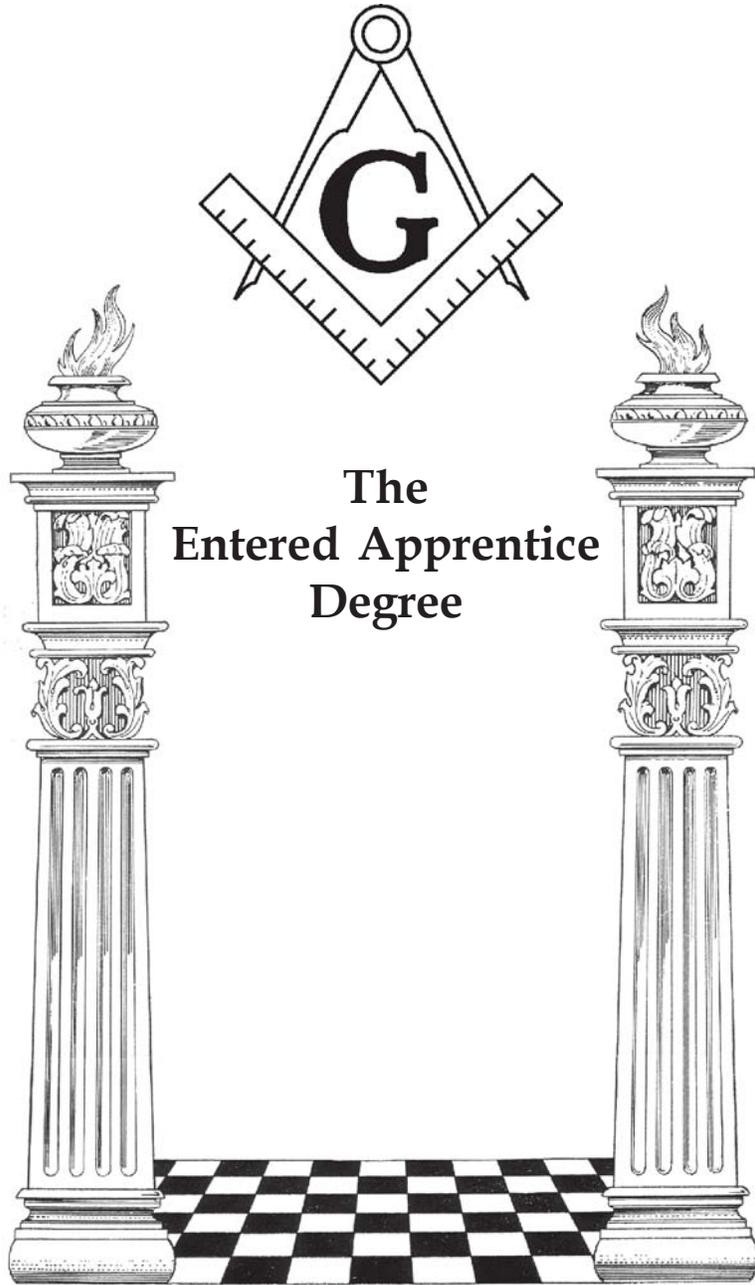
Of course, every Mason could select a different list of questions and some might feel that some answers are not what they would have written, but that is a matter of individual judgment. Michael Poll, a very good friend in addition to being the editor and publisher of this work, provided extremely helpful suggestions but of course the final work and any problems or inaccuracies, perceived or real, are my sole responsibility.

I hope new Masons will use these questions and answers as a starting point. Do not read this book in private. Get together with other Masons in Lodges or elsewhere to discuss these subjects. Use this work to help launch you and other Brethren into the vast world of Masonic history, philosophy, organization, symbolism, and self-improvement. Always question and seek more information and Freemasonry will be as meaningful for you as it has been for millions of Brethren who have taken this path before us.

Paul M. Bessel  
Silver Spring, Maryland  
October, 2005

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## *The Entered Apprentice Degree*

### ***EA-1. What is the official definition of Freemasonry?***

There is no official definition, since no one person can speak officially for all of Freemasonry. Masonic writers have provided some definitions, but none is considered official by Masons everywhere. Freemasonry embraces the basic idea of allowing each man to think things through for himself and to draw conclusions which will bring him the greatest personal satisfaction. One of the most widely used and generally accepted definitions is that Freemasonry is the Brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God. It is up to each Mason to define what Freemasonry means to him.

### ***EA-2. What are some ideas of what Freemasonry is?***

One common definition is that Freemasonry is a system of morality, veiled in allegory, and illustrated by symbols, but some do not find this very helpful. Some feel that Freemasonry is primarily intended to help each Mason improve himself to be a better person. Some refer to Freemasonry as a way of life or as an organization to make good men better. Other Masonic scholars have focused on Freemasonry as a way to learn more about God's plan for each of us. Recently, more Masonic writers have said Freemasonry is primarily a method for humanity to learn to live together in society in a peaceful manner, by emphasizing tolerance and the responsibility of each person to help others. Each Mason can use

some or all of these definitions to decide what Masonry is for him. Most Masons would probably agree that Freemasonry is a fraternity that has existed for centuries, and attempts to bring in as members men who are of good character and who want to improve themselves and help society become a better place for us all.

*EA-3. Why do men join Freemasonry?*

For many different reasons. Many are interested in fellowship, the social setting of getting to know more good men and sharing time with them. Others want to learn more about Masonic philosophy and ideals, and how to improve themselves. Many want to perform more charitable work in their communities. Some want to do several of these things in the context of an organization that has existed for centuries attempting to do good in society.

*EA-4. What are the main characteristics of Freemasonry?*

It is a charitable organization in the sense that it is not organized for profit or for the financial benefit of its members or anyone else. It is devoted to the betterment of each man and of all society. It is benevolent because it teaches helping others as a duty. It is educational in that it teaches by certain ceremonies and rituals, lessons promoting morality and brotherhood. It is religious only in the sense that men who profess to believe in Deity, or a Supreme Being, are admitted as members, and because Ma-

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sonry urges each man to practice his own religion. It is a social organization because it promotes brotherly interactions and fraternal enjoyment of the company of its members.

### *EA-5. How does Freemasonry attempt to achieve its goals?*

Masonic ritual in the three degrees teaches us lessons about how people should interact with one another. Morality, charity, and tolerance toward all people are taught through the use of symbols and allegories, which are fictional stories that teach lessons. Freemasonry also teaches men to be better by showing examples of Masons who practiced and continue to practice the precepts of helping other people, accepting all as brothers, and promoting democracy and freedom for all.

### *EA-6. What are the goals and teachings of Freemasonry?*

There is general acceptance that the goals of Freemasonry include making men into better people, being more moral and helpful in their communities. Freemasonry teaches basic values: honesty and fair dealings with everyone, charity and help for those in need, and controlling our passions. Most of all, Freemasonry teaches us to remember that we are all the children of God, brothers and sisters with all humanity, regardless of race, color, religious or political beliefs, gender, physical or financial condition, or any other outward differences.

***EA-7. Aren't these teachings so basic that we don't need Freemasonry to promote them?***

It sometimes seems that everyone says they support these goals, but unfortunately many do not follow them. This has been true in all times. The lessons of Freemasonry are that it may sometimes be difficult, for example, to be honest and fair in every way with every person we meet, but we must strive to meet this ideal. We might forget about people needing moral support, such as those who are ill and lonely, those needing financial help, and those needing our support to help them accomplish an important task. Even if it might sometimes be difficult for us to give this support, Freemasonry teaches that we should try to provide it.

***EA-8. How did Freemasonry start, and how did it evolve?***

No one knows how Freemasonry started. It is a Masonic tradition that the builders of cathedrals and other large buildings in the middle ages formed guilds, which later accepted others as members. The builders were called operative Masons, and those who use builders' tools to teach moral lessons were called speculative Masons. Speculative means those who think about such things as philosophy: why man is here, what is our purpose in life, and how we should live our lives. Traditionally, over time speculative Masons came to dominate the operative Lodges, and

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eventually they formed Freemasonry as we know it today.

***EA-9. How did Masonry, as we know it now, start?***

In 1717 in London, England, representatives of four Masonic Lodges met together and formed the first Grand Lodge. Of course, Masonic Lodges existed before then, or else how would those four Lodges have started, but no one knows any further details for sure, before 1717. Since that date, we have fairly clear records about the history of Freemasonry.

***EA-10. How did Freemasonry grow since 1717?***

The Grand Lodge formed in 1717 in London started new Lodges by granting them Charters, or Dispensations. Some Lodges in turn formed new Grand Lodges in more countries, until now Freemasonry exists in almost all parts of the world. There are estimated to be about 4 million Masons in the world, with about 2 million of them in the United States. There are Grand Lodges in each of the states of the U.S. and the District of Columbia, with about 13,000 chartered Lodges under them. In addition, there are other Masonic Grand Lodges and Lodges that are part of different systems or branches of Freemasonry, such as Prince Hall which consists mostly of African-American Masons, and Co-Masonry which includes both men and women members. Most Grand Lodges in our branch of Freemasonry, which is sometimes called

mainstream Freemasonry, recognize Prince Hall Masonry but none recognize any form of Masonry that includes women..

***EA-11. What is meant by Ancients and Moderns in Freemasonry?***

After the first Grand Lodge was founded in London in 1717, some Masons came to feel that this Grand Lodge was not doing what it should. They founded another Grand Lodge in England, which called itself the Ancients or Antients, because they felt they were preserving the older traditions of Freemasonry. The other group was called the Moderns even though it was older than the Ancients. These two rival Grand Lodges existed in England for about 80 years, and each one chartered Lodges in North America and elsewhere, until they merged in 1813 and became the United Grand Lodge of England which exists to this day.

***EA-12. How did Freemasonry develop in our country?***

Soon after Freemasonry began its modern existence in London in 1717, Masons started coming to what were then the colonies in North America and founding Lodges here. Some of these Lodges were chartered by one of the Grand Lodges in England, and others were founded by the Grand Lodges of Scotland or Ireland. Still others were founded by Masons without a charter from any Grand Lodge. Masonry grew in America, and after the American Revolution Grand Lodges were founded in each of the States in our country, plus the

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District of Columbia, with the lodges in each state and D.C. being under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of that jurisdiction.

### *EA-13. What occurs in Masonic Lodge meetings?*

At some meetings we conduct the Masonic ritual. This consists of certain specified words and plays, called degrees, that are designed to teach the moral lessons of Freemasonry. At other Lodge meetings we have speakers and discussions to promote Masonic education and the development of the Lodge members to be better people, and also conduct the business of the Lodges.

### *EA-14. What happens in Masonic Degrees?*

The candidate (the person who will become the new member) is conducted by Lodge members during the Degree where he is the central character in the play. He is treated in the most kindly and respectful way at all times. There is no hazing or harm of any sort. During the progress of the Degree the candidate is expected to observe and listen to everything going on around him, so he can learn some of the moral and character-building lessons of Freemasonry. These lessons are so important, and there are so many deep meanings in many of the Degrees, that many Masons watch the Masonic Degrees being given to others for years and learn more each time they see them performed.