

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1972**

**Grand Orator
Ralph W. Winters
“A Challenge Of Principle”**

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Grand Lodge Officers, Past Grand Masters, Distinguished Guests, and my Brethren

Nearly one year ago, I approached this appointment with a feeling of anticipation, humble gratitude and high honor. I looked forward to a year of pleasant association with many dedicated Masons from whom I knew I could learn still more of the truths of our Fraternity, to meeting and renewing friendships with the many Masons throughout our jurisdiction. Our Grand Master, Most Worshipful Lester S. McElwain, has been a great leader to all Masons; he has shown me the way when the way was less than clear; he has offered wisdom when a word of encouragement was needed and above all, he, himself, has been a Mason from whom all could see the Light of Masonry. I am deeply grateful for the short year that has just passed. It will live long in my memory as a year of challenge and accomplishment.

When the possibility of being your Grand Orator became a reality, my uppermost thoughts were how best could I tell the story of a subject that I have long felt was so important and yet was one that most of us take for granted. It is the story of Patriotism, of Freedom, of Truth, of Dedication, of Love of Country, and above all a story of the fulfillment of contribution as an American Citizen. The story has unfolded over the year in many small ways, . . . the story of the Liberty Bell, of the Tomb of The Unknown Soldier, of our Dedicated Forefathers and the story we must tell our sons and daughters, of the country we are leaving to them. Today, I would like to capsule some of these thoughts that we may share together, truths that may have been covered by our own efforts in other directions.

God gave each of us a life to live; and each life has purpose; and each purpose is a contribution to our society. Thus we must make our contribution, large or small, that will fulfill the purpose of our existence. Each life is a very important, God-planned and integrated part of society and by making that life contributory, wholesome and unselfish, we will begin to see a light where our contribution has purpose and meaning. If each one of us did our best in everything we attempted, our best as we alone honestly see it, the responsibilities to maintain a healthy and progressive society would be automatically taken care of and Dependability, Truthfulness, Integrity and Sincerity will again be an integral part of the contribution each life gives for the whole.

The foundation of every honest act is Truth. "Truth is a divine attribute and the foundation of every virtue." Every Mason has heard those words and is taught throughout his Masonic education to search for and believe in this, the most important of the fundamental virtues. No act can have factual meaning without Truth. Falseness may be likened to the house built on sand where truth is built on the solid and unmoving foundation of rock. The one consuming passion of all time has been to know the truth. Truth is the prevailing mystery, which lures us into continuing adventure. Truth is timeless. It exists from the moment consciousness is born. One of the things I remember my father telling me as a child was that you always had to remember a lie but you did not have to remember a Truth. It would not change.

We, as masons, throughout our teachings are given pathways to follow, where we may find the virtues to live our lives according to the will of God. We believe in these virtues, virtues that have meaning, not only for the fulfillment of our own individual contributions but give us the basis for fulfilling the purpose of our lives in the society of America. What are some of these virtues that we take for granted? . . . Sincerity, Integrity, Faithfulness, Dependability, Honesty and Plain dealing. These are important but they could not be attained without Truth. In addition, we must recognize other virtues that are equally necessary: Morality, Patriotism, Responsibility and many, many more.

In the so-called "good-old-days", and maybe not too long ago at that, many of us can remember the time when a man's word was as good as his bond. In those days, men were ridiculed, if not outcast, for backing away from their promised word. Today, however, the neglect of moral principles and the unwillingness to accept individual responsibilities in society, has decayed the virtue of integrity to where it is even considered by some to be a weakness of character to stand up for the "old-fashioned" ideas of Honesty, Truth and Consideration for Others.

Are we willing to analyze our own lives and judge the merits of integrity we have lived by? Can we, each of us, say that we live a life of Integrity? Can we really? When each of us fails to live up to our word or turn away from our responsibilities, no matter what they may be, my brethren, no matter what they may be, we lose our Integrity. We believe in Truth and Sincerity. Many of our fundamental teachings would have been lost centuries ago had not these virtues been founded on, and built around, Truth, Honesty, and Sincerity. All of these are an integral and inseparable part of Integrity.

We cannot change Truth any more than we can change nature. Yet we turn away from real, honest Truth and accept half-truths for the sake of avoiding discomfort, hardship or hurt. Is it not true that we have been weakened by our own consuming anxiety to be comfortable . . . more than being right? We are growing weaker by reason of the deterioration of our importance. Yes, the Things we think are important. Charles Malik of Lebanon, once said: "The trouble is, that you in America, who have a great spiritual message to give the world, are simply not giving it. You give the impression that in America only material Things count. You forget that human greed is insatiable."

And that's exactly where we're weak. Yes, that's where we're weak! What can we do? Well . . . we can begin as upright citizens to straighten out our own lives and live disciplined lives when it comes to material Things. Look closely at Morality and to high moral values. It is one of the important virtues we are given in our Masonic lessons. Morality is a force . . . Morality is a force. It is the magnetic attraction of the heart toward Truth and Virtue.

Let us look at the bible. There are many examples of Integrity, which can be lessons for making order out of our lives . . . if we but put them to practice. One outstanding example is that wherein Job, in his last words, protested his innocence to the accusations of his three friends when he said: "My lips shall not speak wickedness nor my tongue utter deceit. God forbid that I should justify you; till I die I will not remove my Integrity from me."

The greatness of our country was inspired and developed by men whose Integrity was devout. Brethren, the most important thing to them was their Integrity. We can look to these founders and learn from their example. Had not Thomas Jefferson been steadfast in his belief in Truth and Right, we may never have had the Declaration of Independence.

We can look to and follow the example of our great civic and Masonic leaders, for whom we hold such high respect, for they are surely the bulwarks against our growing weaknesses.

Why should we even be concerned about our own individual Integrity? Wouldn't the world go on just the same? The answer, of course, is a loud and resounding . . . NO! The contribution each of us makes is meant to be a very important and integrated part of the progress our society is making. By making that contribution wholesome and upright, each of us will have done our part in making society progressive and not regressive.

Men honor all who stand up for Truth and Right . . . men who never shrink from that stand. The world builds monuments to its patriots but the unjust man fades away into obscurity.

It then becomes a matter for each of us to determine the degree of effort we are willing to put into living a life of Integrity.

The society we live in is a society called the United States of America. Not a very old society by world standards, but our society nonetheless. The pride and patriotism you have for this country is a matter for your own conscience, but the manner in which you exercise the liberties and freedoms given to you by this society is a matter for everyone you come in touch with throughout your entire life. That is what society is. Man was never intended to live alone. From the earliest records we know that man on this planet has banded together for many reasons: survival, companionship, the need for understanding and all the comforts that are part of society living. In a society, therefore, there are many responsibilities that are shared by all according to their abilities and talents.

Each one of us must face the bold and barefaced fact that "someone else" cannot carry our load for us. Especially when it comes to preserving the heritage of Freedom. Since nearly 200 years ago, when the freedom we know today was born, men have literally given up their lives, fortunes and homes so that we, today, can live in a security that our country provides us. But we must accept our responsibility and do our very best to see it carried out successfully. Josiah Stamp said: "It is easy to dodge our responsibilities, but we cannot dodge the consequences of dodging our responsibilities." Easy enough said and the meaning is clear-if we don't accept our responsibilities, the payment for the results will be very dear indeed. Nor can we satisfy the duty by explaining to ourselves that our little bit won't help. It takes a great number of individual efforts to make an effective army. If each of the soldiers felt that his little bit wouldn't help, that he could dodge his responsibilities and let his buddy carry his load, look where we'd have been in any of the conflicts this country has endured . . . to preserve that precious gift we each are given . . . Freedom.

What gives us this heritage? First of all it was the Declaration of Colonial Rights, drawn up by the First Continental Congress in 1774. The Second Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence in 1776, and also the Articles of Confederation in 1778. This same Congress was destined to endure until finally superseded in 1789 by the government organized under our present Constitution, that great document having been adopted on Sept. 17, 1787.

It took great men, dedicated to the purpose of Freedom and Liberty, to write, discuss, amend and finally adopt each of these four great documents. Yes, there were many Masons among them, some about whom you may have heard: Benjamin Franklin, John Hancock, Joseph Hewes, William Hooper, Robert Treat Paine, Richard Stockton, George Walton, William Whipple and of course, George Washington. And there were many, many more too numerous to mention.

What kind of men were these people who had such a common purpose of freedom; who carved a nation of United States from a wilderness? They were influential men. They were men of distinction-lawyers, jurists, merchants, wealthy plantation owners, etc. They were men of means and well educated, but they prepared and signed their names to these great documents, particularly the Declaration of Independence, knowing full well that the penalty would be death if they were captured by the British. The stories of these brave men are stories of sacrifice, hurt, and anguish and, in some cases, horrible death. Yet they knew this could be their fate but accepted their responsibility with Sincerity and Integrity. These were men that gave their worldly possessions, willingly, for the belief that this Country must be free from the oppression of dictatorship, that the people of the Thirteen Colonies, the people themselves, be given the right to determine their own destiny.

That is exactly what the Declaration of Independence did for us and the culmination of that supreme effort was the birth of our Constitution, which spells out the rights and liberties each of us now enjoys.

Today these two pieces of our history are the very foundation of the mightiest republic in the world. It took brave men, who had full confidence in their convictions, and Integrity in their every action, to give us the heritage of Freedom. Let us not overlook, also, the countless thousands of equally brave men who have stood up to a would-be conqueror and fought for, yes, even gave their lives for the preservation of the Freedom they believed in.

Volumes have been written on the reason for the fall of the Roman Empire, but it can easily be summed up in just three words . . . Lack of Patriotism!

Can each of us look at our own lives and believe that we could stand alongside these great Americans and be counted as they were? Can we say that we believe in Patriotism with such a dedication that we would be willing to give our worldly possessions, fortunes or even our lives to preserve Freedom? Are we willing to sacrifice our comforts for this heritage? Can we truly proclaim to the world that we, each of us, are willing to accept the responsibility to practice what we believe?

I would challenge each of you to take a truly honest look at your own life and, in a sincere appraisal, determine that you will accept your responsibilities as an American Citizen, as a father, son or brother, yes, as a Mason . . . and dedicate yourself and your life to the preservation of our free country, so that it can be passed on to our sons and daughters, in as good a condition, unimpaired, as it was given to us by our dedicated forefathers.

During the recent Republican convention, President Nixon made a few comments to the young people gathered in the Marine Stadium in Miami. You may recall hearing him say to these serious-minded youths: "What you do for America is more important than what you do for yourselves."

It now seems abundantly clear, that it is not only our duty as citizens, not only our obligations as Masons, but far more importantly, our contributions to America, that we accept the challenge of the responsibilities of Freedom. We will face each crisis with determination, and success will be ours under the banner of truth, along the road of Integrity.

Like the signers of the Declaration of Independence, like the brave men who won the war of the revolution, like all the brave men who have given of themselves to preserve our heritage, let each of us add our contribution in our own way, sacrifice our comforts if need be, but above all, with Sincerity and Integrity, willingly accept "A CHALLENGE OF PRINCIPLE", THE RESPONSIBILITY OF LIVING IN AMERICA!