

Gary Freedman**R: E: Grand Commander**

8611 Tule Dr.

Amarillo, TX 79108

Cell: (806) 584-1418

Email:

gary.freedman@hotmail.com

**Jeff S. Bennett****Texas Page Editor**

3208 Hyde Park CT

Arlington, TX 76015

Cell: (817) 372-3399

Email:

jeffbturbine@yahoo.com

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Greetings, Sir Knights! As we enter the Christmas and gift-giving season, I find myself asking the question, do we really understand the gift we have been given in the birth of Christ? We are all occasionally, but especially these days, reminded that we are born to die – Jesus, born as man, was no exception. Given the gift of life, and knowing that it is only temporary, how have we chosen to make us of it?

I believe that we were given the gift of Jesus to provide us with an example – a template if you will – upon which to model our lives and actions. Is there really a greater, yet more simple gift God could have chosen to bestow upon us?

Are our lives predestined? Has God already chosen which path we will take on our journey through this life? While God has given us the greatest gift, He has also given us the gift of free will, so no, it would seem that we are free to make our own decisions, and to choose our own path through life. We consciously choose whether or not to follow the greatest example, whether or not to make use of the template created for us by Jesus Christ.

Why then do so many of us choose to take a different path, where we shun our fellow man, and wallow in our own self-interests? Without a doubt we are all human, and in so being, we are also inherently flawed. We are all born sinners, but it is our choice whether to go through life flaunting this imperfection, or to follow the example of the immaculate Jesus. The high road is rarely the easiest path to follow, so we often give into human nature and follow what we see as the path of least resistance, perhaps making our lives easier in the short term, but failing to see the bigger picture.

One of the primary stated purposes of Masonry, and especially Christian Masonry, is to make good men better. Should we therefore take it upon ourselves to perform the daunting task of pointing out and correcting the flaws and faults of our fellow masons and our fellow man? Some of us may see this to be our duty as masons, but I believe the true meaning of this principle is not for us to judge the lives of others – that is God's job – but to examine our own lives and actions, and try our hardest to make ourselves better, rather than focusing on everyone else.

Why is it so important to us that others perceive us as more powerful, or more righteous, or more successful than our fellow human beings? Why does it matter what others think about us, as long as we know we are trying our best to emulate the philosophies of Jesus?

I suppose by definition it is a bit selfish to act in our own interests, but in this sense there is no shame in being a little bit selfish, as selfishness, too, is inherently human, and inherently unavoidable. It is, however, controllable, and we should keep it under a tight reign. When it gets out of hand, everyone gets hurt – those we know and don't know, those we love, as well as ourselves, we all become victims of our own vanity.

Neither Jesus, nor our fraternity invented the Golden Rule, but Jesus is the Golden Rule personified, and it is reiterated throughout the World's many religions, as well as our own masonic teachings, so it must be pretty important. It is common sense that we should treat others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Does a superior concept for the betterment of Man exist? Imagine a world where the mere essence of humanity was cherished by all, where every one of us respected each human life, where independent thought was revered rather than diminished, where God's love for us and the example of Jesus was universally accepted.

Not everyone believes in the concept of Christianity, but the principles remain inherently burned in to humanity. You do not have to be a Christian to be a good person, and not all Christians understand the gift we have been given in the birth of Jesus and the example He has set for us. This Christmas, I pray that we all take the time to reflect on these great gifts from God, and resolve to put them to good use, not just to make others better people, but more importantly to improve ourselves.

Everyone who looks at a Knight Templar, a Shriner, a Scottish Rite mason, or any member of our great fraternity, should see someone who not only espouses the example of the life of Jesus, but also puts it into practice, leading by example. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Treat your neighbor as you would have them treat you. Judge not, lest ye be judged by the same measure. We must all remember that we will all reap what we sow, and that on the final day we will be judged by God on how we have lived our lives and treated others.

There are obviously more questions than answers presented here, but while I have a lot of ideas on how people should treat each other, it is up to us as individuals to accept accountability for our own actions, and ask ourselves if the Golden Rule is worth our time as Knights Templar.

***Merry Christmas and God Bless you all! In His Service,
Gary H. Freedman, Grand Commander***