

Charity and Benevolence - The Easy Way Out

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As we are informed when becoming a new Freemason, the distinguishing characteristic of a Mason's heart is his charity or benevolence. These two words are sometimes interchangeable as they have somewhat different yet similar meanings and actions. First, a short history lesson: In the 1st degree we are taught from the Volume of the Sacred Law, that the belief in Devine Providence or Charity is the greatest of the three graces, the other two being Faith and Hope. In fact, the Volume of the Sacred Law in (1 Cor. 12:31-13:13), says that this is actually Love.

Why is this different or been replaced by the word charity? It has not. The word Charity denotes Love or brotherly love, so the meaning is the same. It's word origin dates back to the 12th century "old French" - *Charité* meaning mercy, compassion, alms, agape, benevolence for the poor, and finally, leniency in judging others. As well, it is also rendered from the Latin "*Caritas*" meaning dear, to cherish dearly or affection.

Benevolence, on the other hand, is a desire to do good to others; goodwill; or an act of kindness. Incredibly, in the middle Ages, this was also the name given to forced extra-legal loans or contributions to the crown, first called for in 1473 by Edward IV, who cynically "asked" it as a token of good will toward his rule. This last definition, thankfully for the English, has fallen by the wayside.

In these modern times, both words Charity and Benevolence are practically synonymous to Freemasons. What is a Freemason or non-Freemason to do? There are many forms of charity and benevolence. We have often heard the expression "Give until it hurts". This is very often easier to say and do. Generally, whenever people hear that expression, they immediately think of giving money. We have members from all occupations and station. In Lodge, we have Kings who sit beside paupers; a person's affluence or rank is a non-factor; even the less fortunate has something to give. This is because, as the philosopher Aesop noted, "No act of kindness, however small, is ever wasted". Therefore, you see, he was not only talking of money.

Great opportunities to help people seldom come, but small ones surround us every day – Sally Koch

There are those who would say, "Charity begins at home". This is a noble sentiment, but as can be attributed to many, it should not end there. Many charitable organizations, foundations, societies, and bodies are set up to administer to a particular need in society. As is often the case, we are inundated with requests for a monetary donation on an almost daily basis. All organizational efforts need some sort of start-up funds to provide their services. There is nothing wrong with making a donation, but that should not be viewed as the endpoint to giving. It's relatively simple to write a cheque or hand over a few dollars. Arguably, it makes us feel good for a short time; however, what your doing is letting others do the work for you. That is the easy way out.

In this modern day and age, people are feeling more time constrained than ever. Peoples sensing that time is scarce, often decrease their willingness to give time to others, be it individuals or worthy organizations. There is one thing we all share, that is the most precious gift in every person's life, and that is giving of your time - because it is something we can never get back. We all only have a limited amount of it here on earth.

As a Freemason, we profess to make good men better. We strive to be a better person tomorrow than we are today, and the there's no better realization of fulfillment than the giving of yourself. This can, and should be achieved, both inside and outside of our fraternal organization every day. There are an incalculable number of ways for you to do this:

When summoned to Lodge, for example, show up 15 minutes early to assist the stewards to set up the Lodge, or better yet, help clean up at the end of the night, when others are hurrying home. Become a mentor to the younger brethren. Join one of your Lodge committees and help your Lodge or fraternal organization. You do not have to lead it but your input is important. When others are busy, ask how you can help. Many hands make for lighter work; it will be appreciated.

Outside the Lodge, the opportunities to make a difference are countless. In the wider spectrum, you can join or become a volunteer in many other community-oriented organizations. They often service a variety of worthy causes and they need your help to accomplish their goals.

In the more personalized approach, you can make a difference in only one person's life. Holding the door for someone, being polite, which by the way never goes out of style, saying thank-you, giving credit where credit is due, being

understanding, are only a few ways to make a difference to someone. Just think of the old saying: *If you want to feel rich it is easy, just count the things you have - that money can't buy.* The next time you are driving and become annoyed following behind a slow commercial vehicle, take it in stride. As you eventually pass him, have a look at the person driving. Remind yourself, he is just a guy trying to earn a living, just like you. He probably does not like holding back the traffic any more than you.

There are those who make it happen, those who watch it happen, and then those who say "What happened?" As Oscar Wilde said: "The smallest act of kindness is worth more than the grandest intention". Get off your phone, TV or social media site to see what others are doing.

Here is the question: "What are **you** doing?"

The future depends on what you do today.