

Appendix A:

Initiation and Consummation — A Personal Perspective on the SBC Study of Freemasonry

by James L. Holly, M.D.

As the annual meeting of the SBC approaches, and as the process of the SBC establishing its stand on Freemasonry draws to a close, I have reflected on my response to what apparently will be a lukewarm and mediocre statement by Southern Baptists. The fact that Freemasonry is satanic, occultic and evil is obvious for anyone who is unbounded by the fellowship of Masonry or the fear of Masons. I am unconvinced by arguments put forth by the HMB's staff to support their contention that Freemasonry is not a hindrance to missions and evangelism, and the implication that Southern Baptists cannot propagate the Gospel without Masonic money.

For years, liberals in the SBC employed the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer as a shibboleth with which to excuse all manner of error. Now conservatives employ the same device to avoid establishing a standard of the truth about Freemasonry. Citing the doctrines of the priesthood of the believer and the autonomy of the local church, to justify Southern Baptists' unwillingness to declare clearly what the Masonic Lodge is distorts both doctrines.

The priesthood of the believer means that everyone in Christ has direct access to God through Christ; it does not mean that everyone can believe or practice whatever he will. The doctrine does mean that the church will not use coercive methods to require individuals to accept the truth. It does not mean that the church will fail to declare the "whole counsel of God", in the face of which individuals will make personal judgments. The doctrine does mean that every man is accountable to God directly for his own sins; it also means that we are accountable for the sins of others, if we do not clearly warn them of their sin.

The 107-page, HMB-staff study has Southern Baptists virtually embracing the Masonic Lodge. The seven-page trustee report and recommendation has an element of truth, but it is weakly stated, and seems to be crafted in such a way as to allow it to be ignored. This has caused me to reconsider my goals in the task that began

in March of 1992. As I understand my commission from God in this matter, it was that Southern Baptists have an opportunity to divest themselves of the impediment of the Masonic Lodge. That opportunity has been provided. The question which I must now face is, "Have I done what I should, and what should I do now?"

Apparently, if it had been left to the leadership of the Convention, the HMB staff and a majority of HMB trustees, a far more compromising report and recommendation would have been forthcoming. However, because of a few courageous trustees, whose deeds will be awarded their merit at the Judgement Seat of Christ, Southern Baptists will not suffer the humiliation of a complete compromise on Masonry.

Yet, the reality is that the SBC has the right to compromise. I had the responsibility to bring the matter of Freemasonry to the attention of God's people, but I do not have the responsibility, or the right, I believe, to demand that the Convention do what is right. Ultimately, only God has that right, and at the Judgment, He will exercise that right. Perhaps it will only be then that motives, attitudes, truth and equity will be sorted out. For me to press the matter of Freemasonry beyond God's commission would reflect the pride of saying, "I am right, and, until you acknowledge that, I am going to harass you." To believe that I am right on this matter is not prideful. To require that others acknowledge that rightness, as a vindication of my obedience to God, would be prideful. Man cannot do that which God has chosen not to do, i.e., force men to walk in God's truth.

If I have done what God called me to, then the failure of the Convention in which I fellowship to affirm what I know and believe about Freemasonry should not cause me to be angry, frustrated or depressed. These are natural human emotions. When what you honestly believe is a critical matter is dealt with in a rather cavalier manner by the religious body with which you are affiliated, they are common emotions. But, God has called His people to faithfulness, not fruitfulness. Jesus did not say, "Well done, thou good and fruitful servant." He placed the emphasis where it belonged, on faithfulness.

If I have been faithful to what God called me to, if I have maintained a right spirit, attitude and motive, then even in the face of failure, I can have joy, peace, hope and mercy. As the Lord has released me emotionally from the impending compromise of the SBC, I have had joy, peace, hope and mercy.

I have joy in being called to be a man of God. I have peace that Luke 17:10 applies to my life in the matter of Freemasonry. I have hope that God will not cast off Southern Baptists because of their

Laodicean spirit, but that He will continue to knock, seeking entrance into the corridors of power which have been established in the bureaucracy we know as the SBC. I have hope that the seed of truth in the seven- page HMB trustee report and recommendation will grow until Southern Baptists courageously cast off the shackles of Freemasonry. I have mercy in asking God to forgive Southern Baptists for their compromise, and to give them the courage to acknowledge the truth about the nature, goals and origins of Freemasonry.

There is no more that I can do, but more importantly, it is my conviction, that there is no more that I should do. There is much that the leadership of the SBC, the HMB staff and the HMB trustees can do. More importantly, there is much more that they should do. Confident of the sovereignty of God, and hopeful of the sincerity of His people, I must now trust, that in time, they will do it.

Therefore, it is my intention at the SBC in Houston to have the joyful countenance which comes from obeying God. It is my intention, after the SBC in Houston, to turn my full and complete attention to the primary calling of God upon my life. In the ministry brochure which describes the Men's Conference Ministry of Mission and Ministry to Men, Inc., that calling is defined as:

"being a godly man whose life testifies to the love and grace of Jesus Christ and gives glory to Him; who can speak with authority, 'Thus saith the Lord', thereby seeing others brought into the kingdom of God and into an abundant, disciplined walk with the Lord Jesus Christ."

I do this with joy and expectancy. It is my prayer today, that God, in His mercy, will call His people to Himself once again. My experience today is one of abounding love for Christ, of awareness of my own failures, and of a sincere and genuine hope that God will use Southern Baptists as a vehicle for bringing real revival to America.

James L. Holly, M.D.
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