

CIVILITY AND THE STANDARD WORK OF WASHINGTON FREEMASONRY

The principles of Freemasonry seem to naturally encourage the fraternity to exhibit leadership in the promotion of social civility. The tenets of Freemasonry, Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth, form the foundation for this leadership. Our Standard Work is rich in ceremony and symbolism that remind our members of their responsibilities to each other and to society. "Freemasonry consists of a course of moral and philosophical instruction illustrated by hieroglyphics and taught, according to ancient usage, by types, emblems and allegorical figures." It is within these hieroglyphics, types, emblems and allegorical figures that our lessons in civility are most frequently found. I have attempted to glean from our Standard Work these references in order to link the principles of our fraternity with the Civility Project ongoing with support from the Grand Lodges of the western United States. I expect this to serve as a foundation for educational material for our lodges and for other purposes that may develop. (Any italics are mine.)

-- We come to "To learn to subdue our passions and improve (ourselves) in Masonry."

Virtues: Discipline

-- In retiring the flag we state "we have worked, as Masons, for the good of humanity."

Virtues: Generosity, Equanimity

-- In our **charge at closing** we are reminded that we have promised to "befriend and relieve every Brother who shall need your assistance." To "remind a Brother *in the most friendly manner* of his fault, to endeavor to aid his reformation, and to defend his character." Furthermore, "every human being has a claim on these kind offices."

Virtues: Fidelity, Generosity, Education

-- Every candidate to the degrees of Masonry must declare upon his honor that he "will *cheerfully conform* to all the ancient usages and customs of the Fraternity."

Virtues: Appropriate Conduct

-- **During the circumambulation** "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for the brethren to dwell together in unity."

Virtues: Friendship, Harmony

-- Our apron is given as "an ever-present reminder of a purity of life and rectitude of conduct, a never-ending inspiration for nobler deeds, for higher thoughts, for greater achievements..."

Virtues: Character

-- "The Rule, the Square, and the Compasses are emblematical of the conduct we should pursue in society: To observe punctuality in all our engagements; faithfully and religiously to discharge those important obligations which we owe to God and

our neighbor; to be upright in all our dealings; to keep within bounds those unruly passions which oftentimes interfere with the enjoyment of society and which degrade both the man and the Freemason.”

Virtues: Discipline, Decency

-- “The square teaches morality; the Level, equality; and the Plumb, rectitude of conduct.”

Virtues: Morality, Equanimity, Civility

-- “The three great tenets of a Mason’s profession are: Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth.”

Virtues: Friendship, Benevolence, Honesty

-- “Truth is a divine attribute and the foundation of every virtue. To be a good man and true is the first lesson taught in Masonry. On this theme we contemplate, and by its dictates endeavor to regulate our conduct; hence, while influenced by this principle, hypocrisy and deceit are unknown among us, sincerity and plain-dealing distinguish us, and heart and tongue join in promoting each other’s welfare and rejoicing in each other’s prosperity.”

Virtues: Honesty, Fidelity, Sincerity

-- “Prudence...should be the peculiar characteristic of every Mason, not only for the government of his conduct while in the Lodge, but also when in the world.”

Virtues: Prudence, Civility

-- In the Charge to an Entered Apprentice Mason: “As an individual, you are charged to practice the domestic and public virtues. Let Temperance chasten, Fortitude support, and Prudence direct you, and Justice be the guide of all your actions. Be especially careful to maintain, in their fullest splendor, those truly Masonic ornaments, Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth.”

Virtues: Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence

-- In the obligations of the Second and Third Degrees, we promise specific things that keep order in our Lodges, outline our allegiance to the Constitutions of Freemasonry, and emphasize our responsibilities to our Brethren and society.

Virtues: Civility, Secrecy, Responsibility

-- “The Working Tools of a Fellowcraft Mason are the Plumb Square and Level.”
“The Plumb admonishes us to walk uprightly in our several stations before God and man, squaring our actions by the Square of Virtue, and remembering that we are traveling upon the Level of Time to that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler returns.”

Virtues: Character, Decency, Humility

-- “By Speculative Masonry we learn to subdue the passions, act upon the square, keep a tongue of good report, maintain secrecy, and practice charity.”

Virtues: Character, Civility, Secrecy, Charity

-- From the Charge to a Fellowcraft Mason: "Your general good reputation affords satisfactory assurance that you will not suffer any consideration to induce you to act in a manner unworthy of your respectable character which you now bear; but, that on the contrary, you will ever display the discretion, virtue, and the dignity which become a worthy and exemplary Mason."

Virtues: Respectability, Discretion, Dignity

"Our laws and regulations you are strenuously to support, and always be ready to assist in seeing them duly executed. *You are not to palliate or aggravate the offenses of your brethren;* but, in the decision of every trespass against our rules, you are to judge with candor, admonish with friendship and reprehend with justice."

Virtues: Civility, Integrity, Judgment

-- "The Working Tools of a Master Mason are all the implements of Masonry, indiscriminately, but more especially the Trowel." We are to make use of the Trowel for "spreading the cement of brotherly love and affection—that cement that unites us into one sacred band or society of friends and brothers, among whom no contention should ever exist, but that noble contention, or rather emulation, of who best can work and best agree."

Virtues: Fidelity, Friendship, Harmony

-- "The Book of Constitutions guarded by the Tyler's Sword reminds us that we should be ever watchful and guarded in our thoughts, words, and actions, particularly when before the uninitiated, ever bearing in remembrance those truly Masonic virtues, silence and circumspection."

Virtues: Discretion, Discipline

-- The Charge to a Master Mason states the following: "To your inferiors in rank or office, you are to recommend obedience and submission; to your equals, courtesy and affability; and to your superiors, kindness and condescension. Universal benevolence you are zealously to inculcate; and, by the regularity of your own conduct, afford the best example for the conduct of others less informed."

Virtues: Civility, Benevolence, Tact

-- At Installation, the Master-elect agrees "...to avoid private piques and quarrels, and to guard against intemperance and excess. ...to be cautious in your behavior, courteous to your brethren, and faithful to your Lodge. ...to promote the general good of society, to cultivate the social virtues, and to propagate the knowledge of the mystic art." "...so you, as Master of the Lodge, are admonished, by the symbolic meaning of the Square, to preserve that moral deportment among the members of your Lodge which should always characterize the good and pure, especially the good Mason; and to exert your authority to prevent ill-feeling or angry discussion arising to impair the harmony of their meetings."

Virtues: Leadership, Civility, Education, Equanimity, Morality, Wisdom

-- From the Charge to the Lodge at Installation of Officers "May kindness and brotherly affection distinguish your conduct as men and Masons."

Virtues: Kindness, Friendship

-- Our Cornerstone Laying Ceremony "...is permeated with the symbolism of the building of human character. In that sense, we all are architects; and as I return to you these implements, I admonish you to use them carefully in superintending the erection of this temporal building; and I also charge these, my brethren, to use them in a symbolic sense to try and to test each word, and each action, that no stones may go into their spiritual buildings that are not Just, Right, and True.

Virtues: Idealism, Justice, Righteousness, Truth

-- From the Dedication of Masonic Halls: "As Freemasonry aims to enliven the spirit of Philanthropy, and promote the cause of Charity, so we dedicate this Hall to Universal Benevolence, in the assurance that every brother will dedicate his affections and his abilities to the same generous purpose; that while he displays a warm and cordial affection for those who are of the Fraternity, he will extend his benevolent regards and good wishes to the whole family of mankind." "While, in almost every other association of men, political animosities, contentions, and wars interrupt the progress of Humanity and the cause of Benevolence, it is our distinguished privilege to dwell together in peace, and to engage in plans to perfect individual and social happiness."

Virtues: Charity, Philanthropy, Benevolence, Generosity, Equanimity, Harmony, Idealism

In the **Charge of the first degree**, It is an institution having for its foundation the social and moral virtues.

"As a citizen we are enjoined to be exemplary in the discharge of our civil duties, by nerve proposing or countenancing any act which may have a tendency to subvert the peace and good order of society."

Virtues: Morality, Citizenship, Civility, Harmony

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