

They Lied on Their Knees

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This Short Talk Bulletin has been adapted from an article appearing in the August, 1984 issue of The Pennsylvania Freemason. It has been republished as a Short Talk Bulletin because of the many readers who recommended its use.

Taking an oath and an obligation is a binding and serious thing.

Accepting and fulfilling an oath and an obligation is an honourable thing.

Not adhering to an oath and an obligation is disgraceful and dishonourable.

During my first months as Grand Master, it has been shocking and disturbing to learn of the number of Masons who have lied on their knees.

Apparently there are Masons who having taken the oaths and obligations of the three symbolic degrees, have not only lied on their knees but have evidenced a total disregard for the Masonic advice spelled out in the Charges shared following the degrees. Following the Entered Apprentice Mason's degree, the Charge says: "In the State, a Freemason is to behave as a peaceable and dutiful citizen, conforming cheerfully to the government under which he lives." That same Charge says: "Nothing can be more shocking to all faithful Freemasons than to see any of their Brethren profane the sacred rules of Freemasons and such as do, they wish had never been accepted into the Fraternity."

In the Ancient Charge delivered following the conferring of the Sublime Degree of a Master Mason, we are admonished "You are bound by duty, honour and gratitude to be faithful to your trust, to support the dignity of your character upon every occasion and to enforce by precept and example, obedience to the tenets of Freemasonry."

Every Mason should at all times conform to and abide by the rules and regulations of the Fraternity. These include the legislation and by-laws of our "Blue Lodge," the Constitution of our "Blue Lodge," the Constitution and Edicts of the Grand Lodge, and also those Ancient Customs, Usages and Landmarks of the Craft that have been passed down to us through the ages. Thus we have a set of rules and regulations that govern our conduct in our own Lodge,

those that govern our conduct in the outside world. All of these, taken together, set the boundaries and should govern our conduct at all times.

Our "Blue Lodge," the Grand Lodge, and the Grand Master have ample authority to enforce the rules, regulations and Edicts, even as they relate to violations of civil law, over Pennsylvania Masons wherever they may be and also over all Masons who live within our jurisdiction.

By far, the most important rules concerning our conduct are those governing our actions toward the world outside Freemasonry. The offences within our Lodges and toward other Brethren and even the Grand Lodge can be handled without adverse publicity, but when we forget the rules laid down for our behaviour toward non-Masons, we blacken the good name of every member of the Craft.

There is a tendency among many Masons to regard the Grand Lodge as some obscure clique or mysterious group working behind the scenes to decide and dictate the affairs of Freemasonry. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania is comprised of approximately 25,000 Living Past Masters and Wardens of the more than 570 Symbolic Lodges in Pennsylvania.

Masonic trials are unpleasant affairs that consume both time and effort and often impose a financial burden on a Lodge. Even the outright suspensions and expulsions handed down by the Grand Master are distressing. Most if not all such actions could be avoided by these steps:

1. We should make certain that every Mason is educated Masonically so that he knows what is expected of him as a Mason.
2. When we find a Brother forgetting his Masonic teachings, we should whisper good counsel in his ear, gently admonishing him of his errors, and endeavour, in a friendly way, to bring about a true and lasting reformation.
3. And, finally, we should guard our portals so that we accept only those men who will be receptive to our teachings and will not find it difficult to conduct themselves as Masons.

Too often, we have witnessed shocking examples of the irresponsibilities of men in high places as well as in low places. As a man thinketh, so is he.

The good name of Freemasonry is not the result of what we do not do, it is the result of practising outside the Lodge those great moral lessons we are taught within the Lodge. At no time in the history of our Nation has there been a greater need to exercise the principles and moral teachings of Freemasonry than now.

Freemasonry is one of the great moral forces remaining in the world today. But if Freemasonry is to achieve its honourable purpose – that of building a better world – it must first build better men to work at the task.

No man has any right to claim to be a Freemason unless he has endeavoured to put into practise the lessons received when he was Entered, Crafted and Raised. A Mason should never entertain the thought that he must go to a Lodge Room to practise his Masonry. Masonry must be practised in daily life where human kindness and helpfulness and honesty are so much needed. The surest way to make Freemasonry useful, is to make use of Freemasonry. Every Mason is charged with the responsibility of keeping the reputation of the Fraternity unsullied.

Masonry cannot condone the continued membership of those who bring disgrace, dishonour, and discredit to our Ancient and Honourable Fraternity. Hence, my Brethren, if and when you learn of a case or cases whereby the behaviour of any Mason or Masons borders on or actually results in a felony or another form of unmasonic conduct, please make such a case or cases known to the Grand Master through proper and expeditious channels.

Today, we hear it said from time to time that our own Lodges are winking at violations of our Masonic law. I ask the question: Are we growing that lax in the enforcement of our penal code? If such be the case, then it is time serious concern and consideration be given to this matter – this unfortunate circumstance within our Craft. And, for the record, be it known that this Grand Master plans to give the matter top priority in an effort to rid our rolls of any undesirables.

Our priority emphasis will at all times cover the three types of Masonic offences: (1) violations of moral law; (2) violations of the laws of Freemasonry; and (3) violations of the laws of the land including moral turpitude.

We cannot deny that there are men on our membership rolls whose lives, conduct, and character reflect no real credit on Freemasonry, whose ears seem to turn from its beautiful lessons of morality, duty and honour, whose hearts seem untouched by its soothing, manly influences of fraternal kindness, and whose hands are not opened to aid in living deeds and charity. We express our grief as we acknowledge this truth.

These men, though in our Temples, are not of our Temples in the true sense of the word. They are among us, but they are not with us. They belong to our household but they are not of our faith. We have sought to teach them, but they have failed to heed the instruction; seeing, they have not perceived; hearing, they have not understood, or prefer not to benefit by the symbolic language in which our fraternal lessons of wisdom are communicated.

The fault is not with Freemasonry or with us, that we have not given, but with them that they have not perceived or received. And, indeed, hard and unjust would it be to censure the Masonic Fraternity because, partaking of the infirmity or weakness of human wisdom and human means, it has been unable to achieve the perfection desired for all who come within its environs. The denial of a Peter, the doubting of a Thomas, or the betrayal of a Judas, should cast no reproach on so grand, so long-established and honourable a fraternity as that of Freemasonry. But misconduct and misdeeds do hurt our Craft and bring grief to all worthy Freemasons.

Freemasonry prescribes no principles that are opposed to the sacred teachings of the Divine Lawgiver, and sanctions no acts that are not consistent with the sternest morality and the most faithful obedience to government and the laws. And, while this continues to be its character, it cannot, without the most atrocious injustice, be held responsible for the acts of unworthy members.

The fact is, it is no secret that the moral fibre of the people of our great nation has broken down. It has been noticeable since the late 1940s. We often hear of white collar crime, embezzlement, fraud, collusion in some of our largest corporate board rooms, with guilty fines running in hundreds of thousands of dollars, with our peers only seeing the wrong if the culprit got caught.

These are not the lessons we are taught at the Altar of Freemasonry. Perhaps it would be difficult to convince many Masons that we have Brethren guilty of the quick fix and fast buck. But we have had them, we may still have them, and with immediate and proper Masonic disciplinary action, we shall go to the nth degree to eliminate such a curse from Freemasonry.

The young people of our Masonic affiliated youth organizations are always watching us closely. These young people have a new sophistication and awareness of what is right and what is wrong. They have their Masonic advisers whom they naturally emulate, but to them, all Masons are the same and supposed to possess honesty and integrity. These young people are the future of our communities and also our Fraternity. We cannot afford to let them down, my Brethren.

What can Masons do to remedy this situation? We must begin at the first step of recommending a petitioner. The mere possession of sufficient money to pay the necessary fee does not qualify a man to be made a Mason. Before a member signs his name to any petition for the degrees of Freemasonry, he must assure himself beyond any question of doubt that the petitioner he recommends is, in a sense, already a Mason in his heart, and that, if he is accepted, the member will never have cause to regret his endorsement. That is the most important duty and responsibility which a member owes to the Masonic fraternity, his "Blue Lodge," and himself.

And, my Brethren, thorough investigation of each and every petitioner to our respective Lodges is not only the proper time but also the only time for Freemasonry to safeguard against accepting anyone who could very well bring disgrace, dishonour, or discredit to the Craft.

Oh, perhaps the galleries are full of critics relative to points covered by this article. Those who criticize plan no ball. They fight no fights. They make no mistakes because they attempt nothing. The real "doers" are down in the arena. The man who makes no mistakes lacks boldness and the spirit of adventure. He is the one who never tries anything. He is the brake on the wheel of progress. And yet, it cannot be truly said that he makes no mistakes, because the biggest mistake he makes is the very fact that he tries nothing, does nothing, has absolutely no positive input into the cause of Freemasonry and just seems to be his happy, useless self in criticizing those who are making an attempt to do certain things.

We have learned to tolerate our critics. But when you have faith in your plans, designs and convictions, you govern yourself accordingly. Methinks it was Shakespeare who wrote: "Sweet are the uses of adversity." It has also been proven that "Adversity causes some to break, others to break records." And, in the words of Burke: "He who wrestles with us strengthens our nerves and sharpens our skill."

My Brethren, it was once stated that the real purpose of Freemasonry is the pursuit of excellence. I like that statement.

Every lesson in every degree of Freemasonry reiterates the idea that the individual is committed to self-improvement, to the acceptance of responsibility, to deeper sympathy and benevolence, to greater truth, to genuine love of fellowmen.

So Mote It Always Be!

STB-February 1985