

Masonry, is it a Noun or a Verb?

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This program is entitled Masonry, is it a Noun or a Verb? Many brethren will see this as a fruitless argument or may ask why should we worry about this as a discussion subject, or even say that it truly does not matter. I, however, feel that this discourse is one we need to be having more often than not. We all recognize that as our lodges age (along with our brethren), a deeper discussion and understanding of this topic strikes at the heart of our membership problem. Simply stated, are we active in our beliefs or do we just want to "wear the ring"?

In keeping with my educational background, there are some objectives attached to this program. So to use educational jargon, by the end of this program, the brethren will be able to:

- Define a noun and verb in the classic sense.
- Define the terms in the ways that they are emblematical of the Masonic ideals we hold so dear.

Now for a quick review . . . if we remember our grammar lessons from our school days, we all know that nouns are things. They may be described by adjectives, but, at the end the day, they are simply that; things. We are all cognizant that things may be bought, sold, or made. Perhaps the best realization about things is that they are tangible. With the myriad of problems our world is encountering today, we need to look no further than our allegoric Masonic lessons to assure us that we can no longer afford tangible things.

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The next grammar review is to remember that verbs are the "do" or the action of the sentence. And, like nouns, they can be described, but this time by adverbs. The unique thing about a verb is that they are observable and can clearly be seen by everyone. Therefore, we must guard against what we say and what we do each time we put on the ring or invoke our Masonic principles. Part of this wariness stems from the constant observation by the general public so our every move is closely watched and our motives are thoroughly scrutinized.

While a simplistic thought of nouns versus verbs seems a bit benign or unpretentious, once the surface of this concept of "things or actions" has been scratched, the complexity of this line of thought becomes easily visible. From the minute we stand at the West Gate, we are called to action and asked to answer questions and proclaim ourselves as worthy brethren. Over the subsequent weeks and months, we begin to experience what we are all called upon to do in order to fulfill the requirements that have bound us together into sacred band or Society of Friends and brothers. If we remember the pledge we have all made at the sacred altar, it begins with our actions to do what is right for our fellow brethren. After the whirlwind of obtaining our initial illumination, we are required to give something of ourselves so that we might be remembered in our lodge. I know that, for me at least, it is not about material things, but the actions I would undertake in the future that would determine my remembrance of my initiation.

A further explanation or enlightenment and its call-to-action was authored by Albert Pike, one of our deepest Masonic thinkers. Now, I do not know about you, but I can only read Pike's works in very small doses. His thoughts and explanation are so heady and deep; I can only handle a paragraph or two at a time (with a thesaurus and a great deal of time in between each reading).

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In his book *Morals and Dogma*, Pike proposes that: "Masonry is action and not inertness". He asserts that the requirements of Masonry centers on the initiates (and all brethren) to actively and earnestly work for the betterment of the craft, its nation, and the universal brotherhood of mankind. He further declares that Masonry is a "patron of the oppressed . . . a comforter/counselor of the unfortunate and wicked". Finally, Pike explores his measurement of these behaviors on the premise that it is a greater honor to be an instrument of advancement and reform, rather than being able to derive benefit from a rank or office that one might attain. Along this same line of thought, we must become more operational within our speculative Masonry. As a result, what we "do" and what can be observed as men and Masons functions as an authentic or truer measurement of our worth.

Further evidence of our need to make ourselves more active (operative) comes from a Virginia Mason, Brother Blair Via. In his article, "The Third Step in Masonry", Bro. Via imparts that we must go beyond the mere Initiation, Passing, and Raising to live up to the fullest ideals of Masonry to what he termed as Revelation, Education, and Operation. Based on Bro. Via's theory, the third step in Masonry — Operation — is a conscious step and "...marks a man as a Mason — [by] what they do, how they live, and what they stand for".

Throughout our Masonic careers, we have all come to know or have met those brothers that truly live Masonic ideals. We know these few to be Masons before we had formulated a concept of Freemasonry and we can often point them out and use such phrases as "he is the ideal Mason" or better still, "he was born to be a Mason". These assertions are not based upon a title, but on witnessing their individual actions. To borrow from the DeMolay thought, they became worthy of the "commendation of all good men".

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In order for a Mason to become operational, we have to answer or find the answers to several questions. To begin, what are we making for that "House not made with hands"? Is it good works? Is it creating or maintaining healthy lodges? The answer is most likely not that simple. I believe that for a Mason to become truly operational there is a greater need than ever to refocus our energies toward all mankind. Bro. Via proclaims that "new brothers have knocked on our portal and sought admission [after finding] the weaknesses of the flesh". These brethren sought our guidance into "light". They had "beheld the stark horror caused by man's adherence to the philosophy of hate, greed, and brutality in wars [and daily lives]". These new brethren sought to awaken the truths that we (in Freemasonry) have to offer. However the correct question should then be, "What truths do we provide them by our own personal actions?" Now I ask you, is the "do" getting in the way?

So where does that leave us today? We need not look any further than the Charge at Closing for our Master Mason's Lodge to provide us the guide to our actions. I know that for me in my Masonic journey, I can think of no finer, no greater, no fuller assessment device that I can measure myself against than the words contained in this closing charge. So let us briefly dissect these words.

We begin simply:

"Brethren,"

Not dudes, not friend, no titles, no pretensions; but a true brotherhood that can only be felt by those that have a common experience and shared universal lessons we have all gone through in our initiation, passing, and raising.

"We are now about to quit this sacred retreat of friendship and virtue to mix again with the world."

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So what makes a sacred retreat? Although there a multitude of definitions for the word sacred; perhaps the best working definition can describe sacred as something that is worthy of respect and dedicated to a single purpose. A retreat is best defined as a secluded and safe place. Therefore, our place here is where we can meet and agree (or disagree if need be) and learn from each other. Yet, we all know that we must leave this safe haven and go forth to spread our light onto the world.

"Amidst its concerns and employments, forget not the duties you have heard so frequently inculcated and so forcibly recommended in this lodge."

With these words, we must remember that, in our day-to-day world, we are honor bound to uphold the lessons that we have learned in our lodges. We must take into account all the working tools of Freemasonry that serve as the rule and guide for our conduct. The twenty-four-inch gauge teaches us we have eight hours every day for the service of God and the relief of distressed worthy brothers. We must square our actions by the square of virtue; we must walk uprightly in our several stations of life before God and man, and we must meet everyone on that same broad level as one and the same with no distinctions. We must also spread the cement of brotherly love and affection among the entire world and also to circumscribe our actions and keep our passions within due bounds.

"Remember that around this sacred altar you have solemnly bound yourself to befriend every Brother who shall need your assistance."

How often have we ignored this in the name of the "cable-tow"? Have you ever dodged a meeting because you "forgot it"? Have you purposely stayed at home when a CHIPS event or blood drive needed your help? How often have you missed the funeral, missed taking over a meal, or just did not call a brother when you should have?

"You have promised, in a most friendly manner, to remind him of his error and aid a reformation."

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This part of the charge is a tough one when you have to tell a brother that they have messed up. A great deal depends on the "how" and not the "what" in most cases. Yet, how often have we not called a missed brother for fear of how our words may be received. On that same note, how often has someone left their lodge disgruntled at not getting elected to some office? As I alluded to Pike's words earlier today, it is not about gaining a title or office, but through our actions that we will be judged by others. In that same vein, how many Worshipful Masters have left the East in December and kept on going? Why has this occurred . . . are there no more "glories" left to attain? Or have we set our sights too low?

"These generous principles are to extend further; every human being has a claim upon your kind offices; do good unto all; recommend it more especially to the household of the faithful."

These words truly need no additional explanation – but all too often this is the biggest sticking point we encounter as Masons. We are frequently impeded in our journey to light through our own prejudices, ignorance, and, sadly, our own bigotry. This charge proclaims that everyone, regardless of color, creed, faith, socioeconomic status, station, etc., etc. has a claim on your good works and (this is the big AND), we are to give it (whatever it may be) without attachments. Hence, the greatest sticking point of this entire charge.

"Finally Brethren, be ye all of one mind; live in peace; and may the God of peace and love delight to dwell with and bless you."

While I like to claim the following words as my own, I feel that Bro. Via does a much finer job than I could when he declares:

"So long as brother continues to assail brother for divergent political, economic, local, or religious convictions; so long as men seek to gain advantage through

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violence rather than through merit; so long as one portion of society seeks to suppress or handicap another portion merely because of economic status; so long as men consort with the vices of intolerance, stupidity, bigotry, suspicion, greed, envy, and jealousy — so long as these things continue in [our] world, there is much work for Masons to do."

In conclusion my brothers, let us remember why we stood at the West Gate, why we knelt at the sacred altar, took up our oaths, and received the light. So let us go forth with a glad heart and carry those lessons throughout our days, not only as good Masons, but as Good Men. And may the Supreme Architect watch over us all, may he bless us in all our undertakings, and help us when we fall short of the high standards we have set for ourselves and our Brethren. May we also allow our daily actions to illustrate who we are and how we live our Masonic beliefs.

Thank you.

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