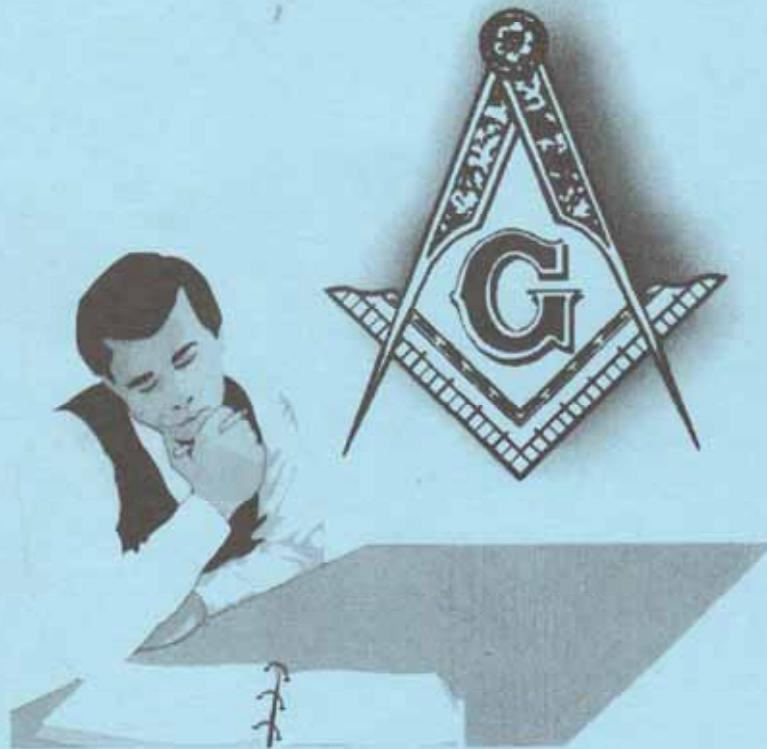


October - December 1999

How Does It Affect Me?

THE FIRST DEGREE



The Committee on Masonic Education
The Grand Lodge of A.F. & A.M.
of
North Carolina

P Lodge Night
PROGRAM

OCTOBER -
DECEMBER 1999

Fall -
A time of change

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To the Masters and Officers of the Lodges

When the Grand Lodge asked for your opinions in 1997, 100% of those responding said that they want more Masonic Education programs. In my Goals and Objectives for 1999-2000, one of my top three priorities is Masonic Education. I told you that I would like for the Masonic Education Committee to furnish at least two Masonic Education programs to each Lodge each month.

The Lodge Night Program was created in response to the many requests by the Masons of North Carolina for more interesting and informative lodge meetings. Each nightly program is designed to bring about thought and discussion that will help in "making good men better."

Overwhelmingly, our members have asked how the various teachings, actions and expectations of Freemasonry affect them. They want to know how they can use Masonry to improve their lives and the lives of their families. It should be our goal as Masons to answer these questions. Together, we can make "going to lodge" a more interesting and rewarding experience.

I want to thank the Masonic Education Committee for their dedication and hard work. We look forward to the further products of their efforts in the months to come.

Please let me know how you like this Masonic Education material. My email address is cingram@grandlodge-nc.org, and you can telephone me toll free at 1-877-296-1112.

**Charles M. Ingram
Grand Master**

1st Stated Communication in October 1999

The First Degree - What Does It Say?



Since the beginning of time man has asked the Almighty to witness his promises and help him accomplish what he has vowed to do. In our First Degree obligation we make certain promises and ask God for strength.

- A: Much is said in the first degree about keeping Masonic secrets, but little is said about exactly what Masonic secrets are. This can and does cause some confusion. For example:
- Some Masons feel that placing a meeting notice in a newspaper violates Masonic secrecy. They feel that anything having to do with Masonry is not for public view and is only proper in the confines of a tiled lodge.
 - Other Masons believe the fraternity should place itself in the public view. To them the only secrets we are bound to keep are certain words and modes of recognition.

Discussion:

1. Exactly what ARE the secrets of Masonry mentioned in the First Degree?
2. To what degree should they be kept secret?

3. In the marriage ceremony a man swears an oath to God that he and his wife will be one flesh and there will be no secrets between them. Yet, that same Mason swears an oath to the same God that he will not reveal any of the secrets of Masonry to anyone. Does this include his wife? Explain this.
- B. Much is also said in the First Degree about writing anything that could reveal anything about the degrees, the oaths, or our teachings.
- Again, there are some Masons who believe that absolutely nothing should be written or published that in any way might disclose our workings.
 - Other Masons believe that the interpretation that NOTHING can be put in writing is overemphasized and not warranted.

Discussion:

1. Does the First Degree actually say that NOTHING can be written?
 2. Every lodge officer is issued an OSW (Official Standard of the Work) which contains the majority of the degree work, obligations, and ritual of the lodge in cipher (first letter of each word) form. The 1998 Grand Lodge approved sale of the OSW to any brother. Does the OSW violate the First Degree? Why? Why not? Explain.
- C. Over the years, every “secret” of Masonry has been published time and time again. Yet, as we progress in the craft we find that the true secrets of Freemasonry aren’t in the words or symbols we use. They are in our relationships with each other.
- Our words and rituals have appeared in newspapers, books, in movies and on television throughout the world. They have been in movies and are readily available on the Internet. Our ceremonies have been recorded in every way possible.

Discussion:

1. Without a WORKING KNOWLEDGE of the Masonic principles and teachings, does knowing the content of our ritual and ceremonies actually reveal anything about Masonry?

2. Of what use would knowing our ritual and ceremonies be to anyone who is not a Mason? What problems could it create?

2nd Stated Communication in October 1999

The First Degree - What Does It Teach?



- C. The First Degree lecture routinely refers to events and customs in place at the time of the building of the Temple, but the lecture is almost in “parable” form, conveying its lessons by parables, or examples.
- New Masons often get the impression that the lectures are historical facts and should be taken literally. When they make this error they often miss many of the examples, or symbols. The purpose of the lectures is not to report historic facts, but to teach lessons on morality, attitude, behavior, etc.
 - A few of the symbolic statements in the First Degree are iron tools, darkness, the beauty of the lodge, the Temple itself, shoes, the cabletow, the rough and smooth ashlar, and others.

Discussion:

1. What kind of lesson does iron tools teach? Does it necessarily have anything to do with iron tools or weapons? What else could it teach?
2. *Darkness and Secrecy* are again mentioned in the lecture. Is it implied that everything should be kept secret? What else can it mean?
3. When something is said about a shoe in the Book of Ruth is this just a custom? What else could it mean? What moral does it teach?
4. What is the lesson of the rough and smooth ashlar? What does it attempt to teach?

1st Stated Communication in November 1999

The First Degree and Me

- A. As we look into the First Degree we discover that protecting the “secrets” of Masonry has more to do with developing the character of the individual than it does with the security of Freemasonry.
- Most new, and far too many longer-term, Masons assume that the “secrecy” of the First Degree is confined to what they have heard in the confines of the lodge.
 - In the second section of this degree the Master directs us to always act as a Mason.
 - In the Charge each one of us is directed to be an example of Masonry.



Discussion:

1. In the entire degree Masons are told to be different than the average man. How should we be different?
 2. We are directed and expected to maintain a certain degree of character. Should we expect this degree of character from every man? Do we have a right to?
 3. How does faithfully maintaining secrets increase character?
- B. The working tools of the degree are “personal” items. It would be difficult for more than one man to use a 24 inch gauge or common gavel at the same time. By the same token, the lessons they teach are “personal” lessons.

Discussion:

1. How are the lessons “personal”?
 2. Can a person “shape” the personality or attitude of another?
 3. Are the measures of the 24 inch gauge acceptable, or even reasonable for everyone?
- C. The “weaker part of Masonry” permeates this degree. Terms like “youngest” and “new” emphasize the beginning nature of the degree. The candidate is taught to receive guidance from his elders, to seek their direction and respect their authority.

Discussion:

1. What is the advantage of this “system”?
2. Where else is it used?
3. How is it reflected in our daily lives? Give examples.

2nd Stated Communication in November 1999

The First Degree and My Family

- A. There is nothing about Freemasonry intended to create an individual separate from the people he lives around... including his family. Many of the lessons we learn in the First Degree find their basis in TRUST.

- Secrecy without trust is worthless. Another way of saying a man can't keep a secret is to say he can't be trusted.
- One of the basics of the marriage vow and the responsibility of a family is trust. Again, saying a man is a good father or a good husband is another way of saying he can be trusted.



Discussion:

1. How is trust vital in the family relationship? Are there "secrets" within the family that should be protected? How important is this secrecy?
2. How important is it for a child to trust his or her father? How does a lack of trust show itself in today's world?
3. Is it important for a man to create trust within his family? How can the lessons we learn in the First Degree be used to develop that trust? Refer back to the iron tools, darkness, the beauty of the lodge, the Temple itself, shoes, the cabletow, the rough and smooth ashlar, etc.

1st Stated Communication in December 1999

The First Degree and My Job

- A. Much of the stability of the family rests in the stability of a man's job. The world tends to look at a man in terms of what he does for a living. The lessons of the First Degree can improve a man's career. Employers look to the attributes found in this degree as qualities desired in employees. People look for the same qualities in the people with whom they do business.

Discussion:

1. What qualities are the same for a good Mason, a good employee and a good businessman. Are those qualities necessary for long-term success in any of these professions? Why?
 2. Think of the people with whom you do business. Do they possess the qualities we are discussing? Have you ever refused to do business with someone who doesn't?
- B. Some would argue that such qualities as integrity and honesty have no place in the modern-day business world. They feel that any way to increase income and profits is justified.

Discussion:

1. Do you agree with this philosophy? Why? Why not?
 2. Can a good Mason also be a good businessman or salesman? Can he be successful at his trade? How?
- C. In the First Degree we were introduced to the cabletow. Several times it was used as a measure. This measure is often used in family, business and any interpersonal relationships.

Discussion:

1. Is a cabletow's length the same for every Mason?
2. If a "cabletow's length" is the measure of someone's ability. Can we expect as much from one Mason as another?

2nd Stated Communication in December 1999

The First Degree and My Community

- A. Long before we first knocked on the door of Freemasonry events began to happen. From the statements we made on our petition, from information gathered by the Investigating Committee, and from our general reputation we established that we were not "average". Masonry has no desire to affiliate with the "average" man. The entire basis of Freemasonry is to give a man who already possesses a high level of honesty, integrity, and character the tools to expand on and use those qualities.

- B. Likewise, there is a need within our community for men with the same qualities that are important to Masonry. A larger than average number of our members serve in civic groups, church organizations, town, county, state and national bodies throughout America. There is a reason why.

Discussion:

1. Why are so many Masons involved in community activities?
 2. What qualities learned in the First Degree can be beneficial to our communities, church, and civic organizations?
- C. There was a time in the United States that being a Mason was almost a requirement to hold public office. Over the years, that has changed. Though Masons can still be found in most areas of local, state and national leadership, the percentage of Masons in such positions has declined.

Discussion:

1. Why, in years past, was being a Mason important to being elected to public office? Why is it any different today?
2. How can we be examples of the good qualities we learn in the First Degree? What organizations in our community can use those qualities?
3. When can we start?



**Further Reading on the
FIRST DEGREE**

Short Talk Bulletins from the Masonic Service Association

The Entered Apprentice

- 9-59 Apprentices
- 6-32 Apron
- 3-63 Be Particularly Careful
- 3-65 Blazing Star
- 3-26 Cable-Tow, The
- 5-24 Compasses, The
- 9-61 First Lesson, The
- 11-31 Free and Accepted
- 10-77 Good and Wholesome Instruction
- 3-24 Holy Bible, The
- 11-27 Lambskin Apron, The
- 2-26 Lesser Lights
- 12-27 Lodge, The
- 3-61 Movable and Immovable
- 10-27 Northeast Corner, The
- 8-31 Point Within a Circle
- 12-64 Relief
- 11-23 Rite of Destitution The
- 4-33 Rite of Disalcealion, The
- 8-33 Rough and Perfect
- 4-25 Swaddling Clothes
- 11-77 Temperance, Fortitude and Prudence
- 7-32 Trestle-Board and Tracing Board
- 9-33 Twenty-Four Inch Gauge