

The Freemason and Temperance

In beginning your Masonic journey as an Entered Apprentice you encountered many lessons regarding your conduct and responsibilities as a Freemason. Along with the Secrets of the Craft are outlined several moral guideposts to direct you toward a better and more inspiring life. In particular you were directed to pay special attention to the Four Cardinal Virtues: Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence, and Justice.

These “Cardinal Virtues” are considered to be the “natural” virtues found within the nature of man, while the “Theological Virtues” of “Faith, Hope, and Charity” are found within the scope of the Great Architect, His nature, and His relationship with Man and the Universe. It’s proper, therefore, that the new candidate recognize that his first task is to focus on the first Cardinal Virtue within his nature, namely that of temperance.

Plato and Cicero considered temperance to be sound mindedness, moderation, sobriety, and self-control. They felt that by gaining control of the various passions and vices within his nature man might strive toward a better and more productive life, thereby achieving happiness, for happiness was the central goal of man in this world. Only by freeing himself of the allurements of vice, mastering his excesses, and limiting his actions could man gain knowledge, wisdom, and the Light.

The word ‘temperance’ comes to us from the Latin, which means to temper or harden according to its intended use. As a consequence, we must recognize that there can’t be hard and fast rules in this subject. Each person must decide for himself how much restraint and self-control must be exercised in a particular situation. For example, I like to eat cherry pie; one small piece is adequate to satisfy my desire after a hearty meal. My neighbor might not eat as hearty a meal, but perhaps he’ll want a larger piece of pie. Both of us, by the exercise of self-control and by being temperate, would refrain from having a second helping...well, perhaps, after all it is cherry pie..

To some, especially with eating and drinking, the avoidance of excess was interpreted to mean total abstention, while others assumed that temperance really means moderation. As an Entered Apprentice we were all taught the lesson of “tempered” mortar, and that it teaches the “proper” balance and combination in due proportion. The Mason must choose what is appropriate for himself and act accordingly. At all times he must remember his acts reflect upon himself, his Brothers, his Lodge, and the Craft. Thus temperance must become a habit of the first degree and he must exhibit rational restraint and act with circumspection.

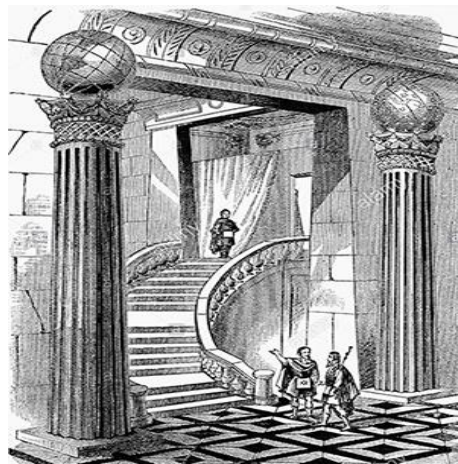
The lessons of the plumb, square, and level, along with the many implements of the Craft, are given to remind each Mason of his obligations, the Secrets, and the Light that we all pursue. Studying the Cardinal Virtues and the Theological Virtues will guide our steps toward achieving the plaudits we all desire. Temperance is but the first milepost in your lifelong journey. In the Masonic school, among the first lessons received is that Masonry contains all the great principles of moral philosophy. It upholds a system of ethics which meets every condition of humankind.

Each of these Masonic virtues is beautifully and separately explained in the first of the several Masonic lectures. Their practical bearings are beautifully impressed upon our mind. The object of this is to teach the candidate that Masonry does indeed, lead to a higher and nobler life.

As he advances in intellectual light, he learns that God, the Supreme Architect of the Universe, moves to bring about ends which will result in good. It teaches the disciples of Masonry to bear all the ups and downs of the world with that patient resignation and moderation necessary to mental improvement and moral elevation.

Temperance is one of those cardinal virtues indispensable in erecting our Masonic edifice. It holds in check, and keeps restrained our affections and passions. The word "temperance" has acquired an unfortunate connotation in modern times. It is frequently associated with the movement to eliminate the use of alcoholic beverages. But the word has a much broader meaning.

The Masonic definition of Temperance may be stated simply, as follows: 'Temperance is that due restraint upon our affections and passions which renders the body tame and governable, and frees the mind from the allurements of vice'. Every Mason is then told that... Temperance should be the constant practice of every Mason, as he is taught to avoid excess in all things, such as contracting any vicious or licentious habit, the indulgence of which might lead him to suffer, or to lose his health, or cause him to lose his reputation.



'The Winding Staircase – Further steps on the path to improving yourself in Masonry'

Douglas M. Messimer, PM, Tuckahoe Lodge 347 2/20