

**Presentation to the Members of Tuckahoe Lodge #347  
By: Wor. Barry Faison  
March 4, 2021**

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**Tonight, I will be delivering a paper written by RW William A. Parks, Jr. that I found on the Grand Lodge website under Masonic Talks in the Education Programs section.**

**Brother Parks is a member of Covington Lodge #171 where he was raised to the sublime degree of Master Mason. He also served as the District Deputy Grand Master for Masonic District 23. Brother Parks is also a 33° Scottish Rite Mason, President of the Scottish Rite Conference of Virginia, and Director of Work for the Roanoke Valley. He is a member of the Masonic Herald Publications Board and a practicing Criminal Justice Attorney in Covington.**

**I had the pleasure of a phone conversation with Brother Parks last week. We discussed this presentation, some of the background for the piece, and other Masonic and non-masonic topics. One of the interesting things I found out was that this presentation was that it was written several years ago. However, we agreed that it still has relevance for members of Fraternity today.**

**The Title of the presentation is Pathological Palaver and the Constitutions of Masonry.**



**The Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free  
and Accepted Masons of Virginia**

**Committee on Masonic Education**

**Lodge Presentation Program Paper**



**PATHOLOGICAL PALAVER**

**and**

**The Constitutions of Masonry**

**By Right Worshipful William A. Parks, PDDGM, DEO  
Masonic District 23**

You would have to be living on Mars to avoid noticing that the level of discourse in our beloved nation appears to have deteriorated. Too few communications seem to occur without a generous seasoning of insults, disrespect, backbiting, backstabbing, slander, and name-calling.

Much of this is accompanied by shameless displays of misinformation, ignorance, and superstition, and seasoned with profanity and the occasional additional threat of bodily injury to keep things stirred up.

Those of you who have escaped any experience with such diatribes are blessed indeed. But all too many of us, have been subjected to such misuse of the uniquely human power of speech and communication. Such events occur when we shop, when we pursue our occupations, and even when we attempt to engage in civilized conversation on the current issues of the day. Need we bring up television and the Internet?

So what does this have to do with Freemasonry? How should we, as Brethren, respond to the demeaning speech that bombards us daily in e-mails and texts, on Facebook, in advertising, and even while we perform the simplest engagements of daily commerce?

We should rightly rejoice that the Craft does, indeed, address this area sensibly, wisely, and at no small length.

As always, when seeking the guidance of Freemasonry, we turn to the foundation document, the Constitutions of Masonry, about which too many Brethren remain unfamiliar. If you have not read this document, be prepared to be impressed with its wisdom, strength, and beauty on this topic.

**Section I, carries the title "Concerning God and Religion"**

It admonishes that a Mason *will shun the gross errors of bigotry and superstition.....*

*Brethren in general should only be charged to adhere to the essentials of religion, in which all men agree, leaving each Brother to his own private judgment as to particular modes and forms....Thus, Masonry becomes the centre of union among the Brethren, and the happy means of conciliating and cementing into one body those who might otherwise have remained at a perpetual difference.*

**Section II, "Concerning Government and the Civil Magistrate,"** counsels us to develop the *quiet and meek temper of true Masons....Craftsmen are, therefore, the more strongly engaged to act agreeably in performing their art, in practicing peace and love, as far as possible with all men.*

**Section III, entitled "Concerning Private Qualities and Duties,"** is loaded with good advice:

*[A] Mason should know how to practice all the private virtues. He should avoid all manner of intemperance or excess....For, in a few words, "to walk humbly in the sight of God, to do justice, and love mercy, " are the truly indispensable characteristics of a real Free and Accepted Mason.*

*....For the better attainment of these shining qualities, he is to seek to acquire, as far as possible, the virtues of patience, meekness, self-denial, forbearance and the like, which give him firm command over himself ...*

And now we get to the meat of it:

*It is further necessary, that all who would be true Masons should learn to abstain from malice and slander, evil-speaking, backbiting, unmannerly, scornful, provoking, reproachful and ungodly language.*

Hand in hand with all of that, the Constitutions provide us a remedy for coping with the inharmonious communications characteristic of the present era, advising us that:

*St. Ambrose places the precious gift of silence [yes, SILENCE] among the principal foundations of virtue...: A tale-bearer, says [King Solomon], revealeth secrets; but he that is of faithful spirit concealeth them.*

But the Constitutions go beyond these admonitions to provide additional pertinent guidance about our actions and responsibilities in **Section IV, "Concerning the Behavior of Masons in their Private Character,"** and particularly in **Subsection 5, " Of Behavior behind a Brother's back, as well as before his face" --- let's repeat that: *Of Behavior behind a Brother's back, as well as before his face, it*** states:

*Free and Accepted Masons have ever been charged to avoid all manner of slandering and backbiting of true and faithful Brethren with all malice and unjust resentment, or talking disrespectfully of a Brother's person or performance. Nor must they suffer any others [to repeat: **Nor must they suffer ANY OTHERS**] to spread unjust reproaches or calumnies against a Brother behind his back, nor to injure him in his fortune, occupation or character, but they shall defend such a Brother, and give him notice of any danger or injury wherewith he may be threatened.*

As you can see, Freemasonry's founding document, its Constitutions, strictly enjoins us to exercise our judgment and watch our words by engaging our brains before our tongues.

This brings to mind a very short story and an allegory.

In a rural courtroom, a woman facing the placement of her children in foster care repeatedly interrupted the witnesses, the attorneys, and even the judge. The judge prudently exercised restraint, each time telling the woman to be quiet and wait her turn to speak. Finally, patience wearing thin, the judge stood up, leaned over the bench and told the woman: "The reason you have to keep coming to court is that never in your life have you shut your mouth long enough to learn anything."

We also may have heard that, upon our passing, our souls rise up to the Gates of Heaven where Saint Peter greets us with the Book of Judgment. Looking over the Book, Peter asks "Howdja do?" Those who respond by blaming the troubles of their lives on their kids, their in-laws, their bosses, their neighbors, their spouses are soon interrupted by St. Peter, who says, "That's not what I asked you. The question is: *How did YOU handle it?*" The Constitutions of Freemasonry are but little changed since originally composed in 1717. And, I think this brief excursion through only a small part of Freemasonry's founding document should impress us with our Founders' prescience and ability to write for the future. It also should demonstrate to each of us the importance of reading this document carefully and then taking its guidance to heart. Certainly, with respect to intemperate speech, our forebears appear to have experienced many of the kinds of verbal excess we are experiencing today, and they formulated ways for Masons to act and to deal with it such excesses.

If we follow the guidance of our founders within our Lodges, we will achieve, in the words of William Shakespeare, in Henry V, Act IV, Scene 3, that peace, concord and harmony among "we happy few, we Band of Brothers." Imagine the peace, concord, and harmony we could spread among the people we interact with, if we discipline ourselves to exemplify those rules beyond the door of our Lodges. Thus, by our example, we can help to maintain the Craft, not only as the oldest, largest, and strongest Fraternity in history, but also as the most morally significant one as well.

If, by our example, we can improve the level of discourse in our communities, we may seldom become so angry and outraged that we might even agree with that pithy observation of our Brother Mark Twain, who said: "Under certain circumstances, profanity provides a relief denied even to prayer."

***So Mote it be!***