

NV Grand Lodge Short Lecture Series
THREE GREAT LIGHTS—THE SQUARE

PART TWO OF THREE PART SERIES

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The Operative Mason used the square to square their work, as free & accepted mason we are taught to square our actions by the Square of Virtue.

As most Masons are aware, the Square is prominent throughout the rituals and ceremonies of Freemasonry and is one of the first symbols introduced and explained to the Freemason. During the initiation ceremony, the new Freemason is told the Square should remind him to conduct his life upon the square, indicating moral and ethical behavior. During the Lecture, the Square is described as part of the Furniture of the Lodge dedicated to the Master, as it is the Masonic emblem of his office. It is also one of the six Jewels of the Lodge, teaching morality. The Square admonishes the Freemason to square his "actions by the Square of Virtue."

"Acting upon the square" is a familiar metaphor for fair and honest dealings with others. The word virtue is defined as behavior showing the highest moral standard (e.g., goodness, righteousness, integrity, dignity, honesty, etc.) *all in all it is moral excellence*. The square has carried that meaning for many generations as evidenced by writings traced to ancient China. In the Great Learning, it is stated that abstaining from doing unto others what one would not have them do to him "is called the principle of acting on the square." We might recognize the positive form of this saying as the Golden Rule, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

From early times, the square has represented right and honesty. For Freemasons, the Square represents morality, of the ethical and right conduct that must form the basis for our every action and as the foundation of society. God provides instruction to man to develop his moral and spiritual character, while the Square reminds us as Freemasons that we must constantly test our behavior by the Square of Virtue.

The Square, as used in Freemasonry, is an instrument with two legs that intersect at a right angle. Though there is debate regarding the exact instrument envisioned in the early rituals, there is no doubt that the square was used to measure the accuracy of angles, to ensure that they were indeed right angles. As such, it is natural for the Square to be an emblem of accuracy, integrity, and rightness. As building materials are cut to fit the building in the proper dimensions, we must also build our character, which must be tested by a moral and ethical standard represented by the Square.

It is also important to note that we must keep God and the Square together. While the Square is an emblem of the virtuous moral, ethical, and spiritual conduct required of all Freemasons, it is our faith in God that provides the basis for that behavior. If society is not careful and loses its faith in God, then its foundation for moral and ethical conduct drifts from that decreed by God. When this occurs, moral law loses its meaning and power, resulting in a society without standards, which will become unstable and eventually fall.

The square is symbolic of wisdom when a candidate enters a rectangular Lodge and walks a circuit with squared steps. He is brought to light to observe the Square upon the Altar and the Master wearing the Square, as the emblem of his office. It is explained that, Freemasonry is not just a ritual. It is a way of life, a way of living. It provides moral and ethical instruction based upon a faith in God that allows us as Freemasons to build our moral and spiritual character. Each of us

has our own Square within us, our conscience, which we must use to test our every thought, action, and word to determine if it is true by the Square of Virtue.

The Square is a symbol of the moral law upon which human life must rest if it is to stand. Without the moral law as our guide, we flounder and fall in this world. If the Freemason does not build his ethical and spiritual character upon the moral law and live in obedience to the laws of God, our lives are incomplete and doomed to failure. David in Psalm 15:1 wrote, "Lord, who shall abide in your Tabernacle? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth..." It is our obligation as Freemasons to "square our actions by the Square of Virtue" in all our dealings with our fellowman. If we "act by the Square," our moral and ethical character will be above reproach and we will have a stable and content life.

Note: Example of the importance, meaning and value of the Masonic symbols of the Square and Compass:

The Square and Compasses are the oldest, the simplest and the most universal symbols of Masonry. All the world over, whether as a sign on a building, or a badge worn by a Brother, even the profane know them to be emblems of our ancient Craft. Some years ago, when a business firm tried to adopt the Square and Compasses as a Trade-Mark, the U.S. Patent Office refused permission, on the ground, as the decision said, that "There can be no doubt that this device, so commonly worn and employed by Masons, universally recognized as existing; whether comprehended by all or not, is not material to this issue." They belong to us, alike by the associations of history and the tongue of common report.

References

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