

NV Grand Lodge Short Lecture Series

THREE GREAT LIGHTS—THE COMPASSES

PART THREE OF THREE PART SERIES

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In our previous discussion on the Square, it was mentioned that it is nearly always linked with the Compasses, and these old emblems, joined with the Holy Bible, are the Great Lights of the Craft. Symbolically, the Earth and Heaven are brought together in the Lodge - the earth where man goes forth to his labor, and the heaven to which he aspires. In other words, the light of Revelation and the Law of Nature are like the two points of the Compasses within which our life is set under a canopy of Sun and Stars.

The Compasses exemplify our wisdom of conduct...the strength to "circumscribe our desires and keep our passions within due bounds". No symbolism can be simpler, more profound, more universal, and it becomes more wonderful the longer one ponders it. Indeed, Masonry becomes a brotherhood & society where all men can unite. Its principles are as wide as the world, as high as the sky. Nature and revelation blend in its teaching; its morality is rooted in the order of the world, and its roof is the blue vault above. The Lodge, as we are apt to forget, is always open to the sky, whence come those influences which exalt and ennoble the life of man. Symbolically, at least, it has no rafters but the arching heavens to which, as sparks ascending seek the sun, our life and labor tend. Of the heavenly side of Masonry, the Compasses are the Symbol, and they are perhaps the most spiritual of our working tools.

While in the order of the Lodge the Square is first, in point of truth it is not the first in order. The Square rests upon the Compasses before the Compasses rest upon the Square. In the Ritual of the Lodge, we see man, hoodwinked by the senses, slowly groping his way out of darkness, seeking the light of morality and reason. But he does so by the aid of inspiration from above. Some deep need, some dim desire brought him to the door of the Lodge, in quest of a better life and a clearer vision. Vague gleams, impulses, intimations reached him in the night of Nature, and he set forth and finding a friendly hand to help knock at the door of the House of Light.

As an Apprentice a man is, symbolically, in a crude, natural state, his divine life covered and ruled by his earthly nature. As a Fellowcraft he has made one step toward liberty and light and the nobler elements in him are struggling to rise above and control his lower, lesser nature. In the Sublime Degree of a Master Mason - far more sublime than we yet realize - by brotherly love, symbolism, and the rich knowledge gained through learning the craft. A masonic brother stands strong, free, and fearless, ready to raise stone upon stone to create the cement that bonds mankind, and be an example to God, Fraternity, Family, and Community.

If we examine with care the relative positions of the Square and Compasses as he advanced through the Degrees, we learn a parable and a prophecy of what the Compasses mean in the life of a Mason.

If we look at the Compasses apart from the Square and try to discover what they must teach us. There are no more practical lessons in Masonry, than the three great lights. As the Light of the Holy Bible reveals our relation and duty to God, and the Square instructs us in our duties to our Brother and neighbor, so the Compasses teach us the obligation which we owe ourselves. What that obligation is needs to be made plain; it is the primary, imperative, everyday duty of circumscribing his passions, and keeping his desires within due bounds. As Most Excellent King Solomon said long ago: "Better is he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

Soon after becoming an entered apprentice, a mason begins to circumscribe his actions to gain symmetry and balance to overcome the chaos and confusion that often grips life in general. The compasses serve as a symbol of self-knowledge, self-reverence, self-control; and reminds us that we cannot lose any one of the three and keep the other two. To know ourselves, our strength, our weakness, our limitations, is the first principle of wisdom, and a security against many pitfalls and blunders. To a mason the symbology of the compasses point to the knowledge need to walk upright a man and mason, if disregarding, a man loses control of himself, and by that very fact loses, in some measure, the self-respect which is the corner stone of a character. If he loses respect for himself, he does not long keep his respect for others, and goes down the road to destruction, like a star out of orbit, or a car into the ditch.

Philosophers of all ages and cultures point to the knowing thyself and mastering the art of life as a bedrock of society and brotherhood to overcome the passions that corrupt man and lead to vice and immorality. Man must look heavenly to his creator to gain understanding of the symbology of Masonry's three great light, to understand the check and balances held between the points of the compass, because there we find the most valuable tenets of freemasonry: friendship, morality, and brotherly love.

"The Compass, as the Symbol of the Heavens, represents the spiritual portion of this double nature of Humanity...and the Square, as the Symbol of the Earth, its material, sensual, and baser portion."—Albert Pike, *Morals & Dogma*

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