

Our Fraternity's Teachings on Prejudice

The news stories of the last few weeks have drawn attention to racial prejudices that apparently existed within an Oklahoma college fraternity. As members of the oldest and noblest fraternity, these events afford us an opportunity to revisit and be mindful of our fraternity's teachings on this subject.

First, let's look at the profane definition of prejudice. The dictionary defines prejudice as: "...an unfair feeling of dislike for a person or group because of race, religion, etc...especially when it is not reasonable or logical". The thesaurus sums prejudice up in one word: "pre-judgment" - basically, judging someone before getting to know them.

Our Landmarks and Constitution & Code are available for the profane world to see. Nowhere in them will you find anything to support the use of prejudice to exclude a man from our fraternity because of the color of his skin or his religious beliefs. Our Constitution & Code only supports excluding from our fraternity any man who: does not believe in God; does not support the moral instructions of Masonry; acts in an unlawful, unethical or immoral manner, or; disrupts the peace and harmony of the lodge.

In the Entered Apprentice degree we received a Charge: *not to countenance disloyalty or rebellion, but patiently submit to just and legal authority, and conform with cheerfulness to the government of the country in which you live.* Brothers, the government of the country in which we live has laws against prejudice. In addition to obeying the law, as Masons we are taught to be good, moral and ethical men. The bottom rung of any ladder that leads to such good, moral and ethical conduct is simply to obey the law.

As an Entered Apprentice we receive a lecture in the Second Section: *Masonry regards no man for his worldly wealth or honors...it is the internal and not the external qualifications of a man that should recommend him to be made a Mason.* This goes hand in hand with the Charge that we receive in the Fellowcraft: *The internal, and not the external qualifications of a man, are what Masonry regards.*

The word prejudice is specifically used four times during our degrees. Many of us have memorized and used this word in our degrees but may never have stopped to take the time to analyze the meaning of what we said. It is important that our actions as Masons reflect our teachings as Masons. To borrow a few clichés “actions speak louder than words” and if we “talk the talk but don’t walk the walk”, if we do not “practice what we preach” we are just setting ourselves up as hypocrites, to do more harm to our fraternity than good. Masonry becomes what our Charge at Opening calls a *useless parade*.

As stated above, the word prejudice is specifically used four times during our degrees. The first time is when we receive the Entered Apprentice Third Section Explanatory lecture. In explaining that lodges of present day are dedicated to Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist, and how: *...there is represented in every regular and well governed lodge, a certain Point within a Circle; the Point representing an individual brother, the Circle representing the boundary line of his duty to God and man beyond which he is never to suffer his passions, prejudices, or interest to betray him on any occasion.* Also during this lecture we are taught: *to regard the whole human species as one family; the high and low, the rich and poor, who as created by one Almighty parent, and inhabitants of the same planet, are to aid and support and protect each other. On this principle, Masonry unites men of every country, sect and opinion, and conciliates true friendship among those who might otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance.*

The second time the word prejudice is used in our degrees is when we receive the Entered Apprentice Charge: *Let not interest, favor or prejudice bias your integrity or influence you to be guilty of a dishonorable action.*

The third time the word prejudice is used in our degrees is during the Symbolism of the Master Mason Degree when we are taught that Masonry: *...enables you to free your mind from the dominion of pride and prejudice; to look beyond the narrow limits of human institutions and to view in every son of Adam a brother of the dust.*

The fourth time the word prejudice is used in our degrees is in that portion of the Master Mason Charge which is not monitorial where it is made clear that as Master Masons we are to have mastery over our passions and prejudices at all times.

Brothers, listening to, learning, teaching, practicing and more especially living Masonry's beautiful principles on this subject are what distinguish us from the rest on the community. Remember that the Compasses teach us to circumscribe and keep our passions within due bounds with all mankind. All mankind Brothers - All Mankind.

Respectfully and Fraternally Submitted

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The Grand Lodge Board of Trustees fully supports the principles presented in this article.