

How a Comma Can Change Your Mind



Recently while looking through a popular catalog for silly trinkets and clever clothing I came across something. It was a sweatshirt that said “Commas Save Lives”. It was accompanied by the two phrases, “Let’s eat, Grandma.” And “Let’s eat Grandma”. See the difference? The misuse of the comma is also the bane of many an English teacher across the country.

Commas are very useful of course, in fact, necessary as they separating correlating pairs, verbs from subjects, etc. Commas can also on occasion change the meaning of the message quite un-intentionally as in “Let’s EAT GRANDMA.” Instead of asking Grandma to eat, it implies you are going to eat grandma herself. That’s quite a difference.

What do commas have to do with Freemasonry?

It has a great deal to do with it if it changes the meaning of the sentence. Our rituals and catechisms have for centuries been passed from mouth to ear. Never are we as Masons to write down any of what we see or do or say in a Lodge Hall. Is it possible that a comma could have been overlooked? After all, we don’t speak commas, they are implied as pauses when we speak naturally.

How can something as small as a comma effect the world-wide understanding of

Freemasonry? It comes down to how we interpret some of our questions most often asked.

We are taught as Entered Apprentices to subdue our passions. This can be interpreted many different ways. It is the up to the individual that wrestles with it that determines what this means to them. A passion is something that generally controls ones decisions. It is a usually a vice, but not always.

It could be a thought, an action or a deed reproduced enough to become controlling. What Masonry is teaching is that as we all have passions. It does not suggest that we eliminate passions. Passion can be a positive influence on our lives. One of the many definitions of passion according to Dictionary.com:

“The state of being acted upon or affected by something external, especially something alien to one’s nature or one’s customary behavior (contrasted with action).”

What Masonry teaches is that we must subdue our passions, to subdue, not eliminate. A person needs passion for without desire we have no will.

To subdue something, also according to Dictionary.com:

To conquer and bring into subjection, to overpower by superior force; overcome, to bring under mental or emotional control, as by persuasion or intimidation; render submissive to repress (feelings, impulses, etc.).

To conquer, to overcome. To overcome our passions, whatever they may be, is up to the individual. One of the ways Masonry provides the tools to assist the Brother in subduing his passions is through simple peer pressure. Pressure in the good sense of the word. So often peer pressure is associated with bad behavior, but it can also be applied to qualities that improve lives. The properly educated Brother feels pressure to think better thoughts, to help, aid and assist other Brothers in need simply because he is compelled to do so through his obligation to the fraternity. He has a passion for the tenets and precepts of Freemasonry.

When I belonged to a gym I felt pressured to attend because I did not want to hear the razzing I would get from my friends that attended and noticed that I was not there. As a result I often went despite having no desire to do so. I was obligated to my workout partners. As time went on and a few moved away I found myself working out alone, and then not working out at all. I had no one to hold me accountable anymore and eventually I stopped going. I had no passion.

Masonry is very similar. We hold each other accountable for our actions. It should be on

our minds every day. We should think about it every day. I have often said, be a Mason every day in every way. In your thoughts, words, deeds and actions. My favorite Founding Father was not a Mason. But John Adams said “Let us tenderly and kindly cherish, therefore, the means of knowledge. Let us dare to read, think, speak, and write.”

Let’s read, think, speak and write Masonic education. Every day. If we are to achieve the loftiest of goals, to achieve what we as Masons claim to be, we must show the outside world that we above all, are THINKERS.



Many a man has taken the three degrees and is still the same man he was when he petitioned the Lodge. If he has been a Mason for sixty years or sixty minutes it does not matter. There is no difference in the man that does not change his thinking. Therefore the dividing line between a true Mason and a non-Mason is simply the way we think.

A man may be committed to being a Mason, but if he thinks the same way he always has, and acts the same way he always does, what has he become? He is the same person, thinking the same thoughts, performing the same actions, the only thing he has changed is his title. We have to change our thinking. We must subdue those passions that are undesirable and replace them with ones that are.

It begins with guarding the West Gate with a passion to not allow any among our ranks that is not worthy. By having a passion for

excellent ritual. Having a passion for proper dress and decorum in our halls. By having a passion for the Fraternity to which we are all bound.

How can a comma change this? By placing it in such a way as it changes the meaning of the sentence. What came you here to do?

To learn to subdue my passions and improve myself in Masonry. That is something we all have heard and read. Let me show you what happens when we change our thinking. Place a comma after *learn*.

To learn, to subdue my passions and improve myself in Masonry.

Now we have three goals, to learn, to subdue passions and improve ourselves. ALL through the careful application of Masonic virtues and by changing our thinking. You cannot become a Mason without changing your thinking. You walked into a Lodge thinking like the rest of the world. If you make it through all three degrees and don't change your manner of thinking what have you become?

The only way to achieve this is through continuous Masonic education. To never stop seeking light in Masonry. There is no destination to being a Mason. By placing that tiny little comma in that sentence, there is a whole new goal for Masons. To LEARN.

Being a Freemason is not a thing, it is not a title, and it is not something anyone should ever take for granted. It is a process of self-improvement unlike any other in history. It is a privilege. The only way we can repay the debt owed to others that came before us is to learn as much as we can in order to teach others. Unless our thinking changes,

we are the same men we were the night before we were initiated.

There is plenty out there to learn I assure you. We are all rough ashlar, let's start swinging that gavel.

