

Reframing the Broken Windows Theory

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I consider myself a fortunate Mason. My business and career have provided me opportunity to travel - possibly more than many other brothers are able to manage. Those travels have taken me to not only numerous Kentucky lodges, but to lodges large and small in 15 other states - and many rewarding discussions with Masons throughout North America.

Another reason I consider myself a fortunate Mason is that I've been able - through travels, to witness firsthand the breadth of our Craft ... and on occasion, the somewhat narrow and bewildering variations of what is *called* regular Freemasonry practiced in North America.

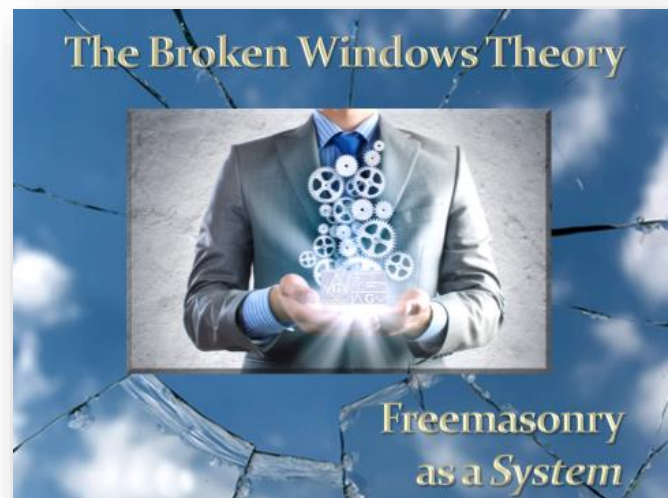
Notwithstanding these distinguishing, yet troubling variations I have observed - or perhaps in *thanks* to them - it's much clearer and conspicuously evident that Freemasonry has always been intended to be practiced as a COMPLETE SYSTEM.

Yet, there's little evidence that supports any claim of North American Freemasonry being practiced as the complete system as it was designed and intended.

There's a proven blueprint for Freemasonry - and if followed in the manner in which blueprints are intended to be used, firmly establishes our Craft as *an educational society offering moral instruction - not a social club OR service organization, and certainly not an Order whose primary function is to focus as a collection agency for social philanthropy.*

Unfortunately, brethren, much of our fraternity is anything but an education society offering moral instruction - and much of it is *far* from being practiced as a complete system.

As a result - AND in despite of well-intended efforts



over the past 6 decades - as well as the initiation, passing and raising of at least 3 generations of Masons during that time, we've ended up with *more members than Masons* -

Furthermore - we've also ended up with more members *knowing less* about our Craft's *factual* history, purpose, rituals, and profound lessons than arguably anytime in our past.

I'm sure you will agree that the greatest enemy of knowledge *is not* ignorance - but the illusion of knowledge - which is much worse than ignorance

How can a system work adequately if there are parts missing? How can we practice anything with which we are not fully aware of all the parts necessary?

The metaphorical story of the Blind Men and the Elephant appears in many philosophies and disciplines. In various versions of the tale, a group of five blind men touch an elephant to learn what it is like.

One blind man, who had touched the trunk of the elephant, said that the elephant must be like a thick tree branch. Another who touched the tail said the elephant probably looked like a snake or rope. The third man, who touched the leg, said the shape of the elephant must be like a pillar. The fourth man, who touched the ear, said that the elephant must be like a huge fan;

while the fifth, who touched the side, said it must be like a wall.

They sat for hours and argued, each one was sure that *his* view was correct.

Obviously, they were all correct from their own point of view, but no one was quite willing to listen or take into account the perspectives of the others.

Finally, they decided to go to the wise man of the village and ask him who was correct. The wise man said, "Each one of you is correct; and each one of you is wrong. Because each one of you had only touched a part of the elephant's body. Thus, you only have a *partial view* of the animal. If you put your partial views together, you will get an idea of what an elephant looks like."

Each blind man could only "see" what he already believed to be true. He did not "see" the elephant as a "system" of parts, but individual parts and each believed their part was all that was necessary for an explanation of what an elephant looked like. We can say the same thing about the way we have seen Freemasonry approached and evolve over the past many decades.

We all know, or should know, the importance of *systems*.

- Freemasonry is not just part fellowship.
- It is not just part ritual.
- It is not just part business meetings, education, signs, and symbols, lessons, protocols, etiquette, inquisitiveness about origins, secrets, personal appearance, charity, gentlemanly behavior, manners, lapel pins, rings, tolerance, introspection,
- Freemasonry *is* about ***all of those things*** – *all of those things integrated and woven into a interconnected fabric offering a brilliant*

system through which good men can further improve themselves.

Now, can a system operate without all parts of it in working order or working together?

Sure, it can, but how long before it starts looking and behaving like something other than the original

system? Something ordinary – in the case of Freemasonry, it begins to look like something very similar to other clubs and certainly service we see today?

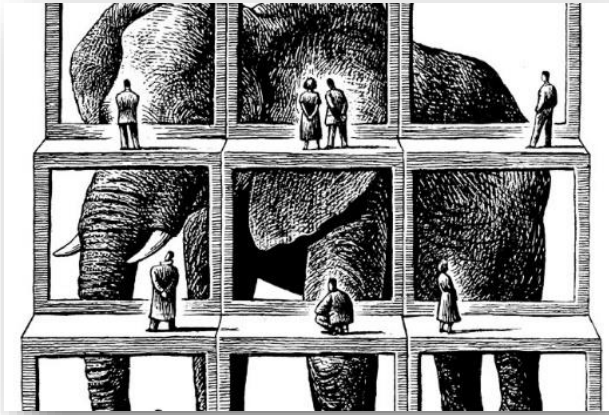
When an organizational or institutional system breaks down, it begins to change into a different type of system. It's subtle at first, but ultimately a new faction of an old system evolves into a

new one - even though the new factions cannot assure they produce or generate the same purposeful or positive results as did the old system.

Freemasonry, over the last fifty years or more, fell into the trap common in organizations of any kind: it failed to see how leaving out parts of the intended system would affect what was produced.

We see the following examples.

- As fundamental Masonic education found itself slowly relegated to a lower tier of importance just over the past 60 years, accurate history and the profound moral lessons which are a part of the fundamental blueprint, as a result - turned rather fuzzy.
- As tedious business meetings took the place of opportunities for education, conviviality and fellowship time and feasts, fewer men attended lodge, and protocols and etiquette sadly turned casual as did our ceremonies and passionate delivery of our rituals.
- The West Gate was less guarded than before, allowing more men into the fraternity who would otherwise never have been accepted, which further weakened the system as some of



these members found themselves in officer chairs (ultimately even the East) before they had the time to learn, much less practice, many of the facets of our Craft.

As the system slowly became more casual, so did the mechanics of Masonry and the gears that once drove the Craft as a complete system began to show wear, and splinter into additional factions of different kinds of systems where Freemasonry was believed to be only the parts found convenient to practice - or worse: only what had been passed down by men who were not properly instructed in the first place.

We say Freemasonry is a “*peculiar system*,” - in fact, we read and hear the phrase that *Freemasonry is a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory, illustrated by symbols* so often, we have come to accept it as a quick definition but without thinking about the two words in that sentence that offers us evidence that Freemasonry is indeed meant to be a system – and intended to be practiced as such.

First, we need to understand the word *peculiar*, which means “special” - not weird or odd. Secondly, we need

blueprint that offers a structure and method designed to constructively influence behavior when practiced.

- So, what happens when parts of that *system* are missing?
- What happens when the blueprints are ignored?

When any system doesn't work in concert with all its parts we can identify a rippling effect begin to occur – especially in organizations.

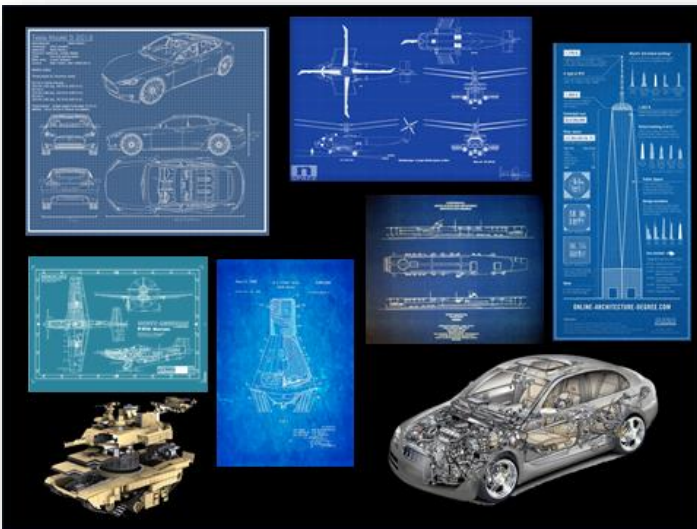
For example, when the red engine light appears on the dash of our car, we can take measures to assure that we address that red light before it begins to affect other parts of the workings of that engine.

The rippling negative results would come if we completely ignore that red light until the engine locks up or over heats, thus ending the ability of the rest of the automobile's system to work with the engine that creates the energy to propel it.

This rippling effect might also be thought of as an *unintended consequence*.

Failing to understand, appreciate and accept that connected or interrelated systems work best as systems is simply a *dead-end*.

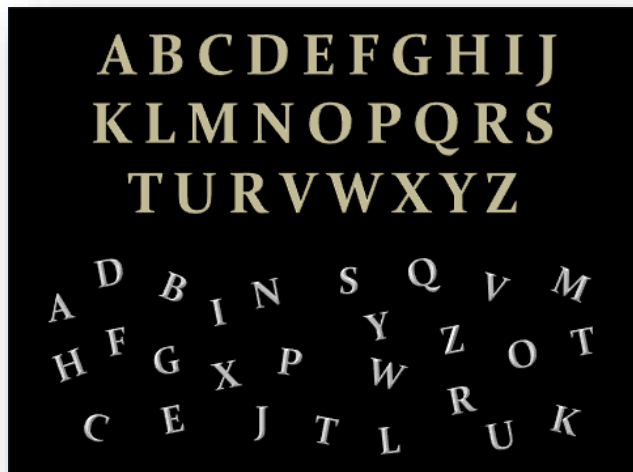
Another example is our alphabet. We have 26 letters and rules of grammar that transforms them into something readable. Unless we put them in a form that creates sentences and communicates thoughts and expression, they are nothing but individual marks.



to appreciate the meaning of the word *system* and that definition is this: *an arrangement of individual or parts so as to constitute a perfect whole*.

So - Freemasonry, with its many interrelated parts, *is* clearly meant to be practiced as a system – and one that even comes with a well-established and proven

When Freemasonry is practiced applying only a few of its interconnected parts, we do not end up with Freemasonry as calculated ---- we end up with a debased system that is indeed “*peculiar*” and certainly



contrary to its intended design and offerings. We see this *peculiar* practice throughout American Freemasonry. How did it happen?

Many traditions and practices once considered vital to the system of Freemasonry has, over the years, vanished. Others were intentionally set aside to merely save time back in the post WWII days when there were so many men coming into the fraternity that time was of the essence in getting them all initiated, passed and raised - so many men were never exposed to lost traditions – making many believe that if and when one or more older practice or tradition was revived they were some sort of innovation – when in fact, some were lost because the generations before them did not know they existed in the first place – such as:

- Structured and ongoing Masonic education long past – and in more in depth than what ritual provides
- specific activities, such as Festive Boards and music in lodge designed to foster the Masonic spirit and facilitate fraternalism -
- the elegance of the ritual delivery and more formal instead of casual dress
- Expected protocol and etiquette – chains of union, Reflection rooms,
- a consistent and firm guarding of the West Gate
- Rushing candidates through degrees the ill-conceived wide-spread notion that our ritual

alone could substitute for ongoing wholesome Masonic education

- ALSO - WE ended UP with the placement of men in leadership positions who were not prepared to lead the Craft *as were* many of their predecessors,
- AS we adopted quick fix strategies – largely designed to swell our membership roles we despoiled the system – as we also
- accepted the proliferation of the flawed belief that the purpose of Freemasonry is to essentially serve as a charitable organization instead of an educational institution offering moral instruction.

These are only a few things that have been divested from our Craft in North America to the extent in many cases that aside from our aprons - and perhaps the arrangement of a lodge room, it is a challenge to recognize the system of Freemasonry being practiced in far too many areas.

PART II

In 1982, the “Broken Windows” theory, which explained the increase in crime, disorder, and widespread decline in urban and inner-city neighborhoods, was introduced.

Until noted political scientist and criminologist James Q. Wilson and George Kelling wrote about it, officials were perplexed as to what contributed to some neighborhoods thriving while others decayed - a question which had fascinated social scientists for decades.

The answer was found amidst the broken glass and litter and graffiti, telling us that ignoring the little problems creates a sense of irreversible decline that leads people to abandon the community or to stay away.

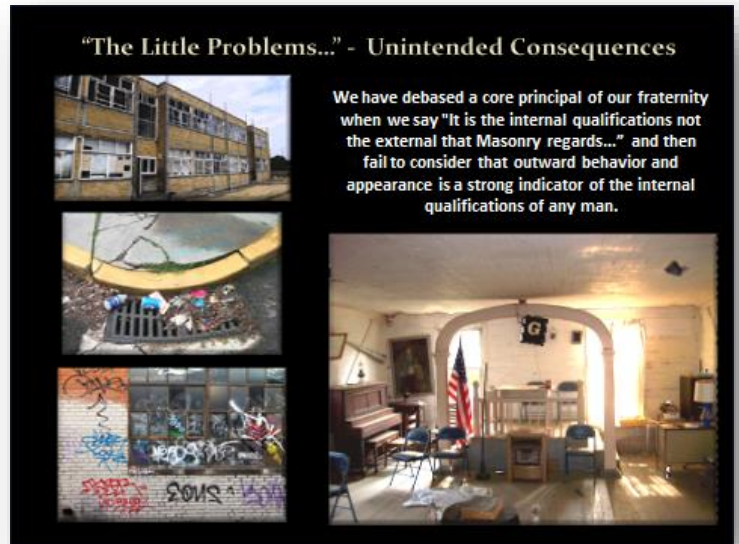
That theory, in turn, produced a revolution in law enforcement practices and shaped neighborhood activism over the past 3 decades.

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- If there were broken windows in a neighborhood or community - the goal was to get building owners to replace them.
- If there was graffiti on the walls, then efforts came about to scrub them clean, and then get tough with graffiti artists.
- If abandoned cars were found around the neighborhoods, they were hauled away.
- If drunks were sleeping or loitering on the sidewalks, if drug dealers were gathering on street corners or in public parks, then not only did the police focus on removing and displacing them, but the public reported them and, in many cases, began to chase them away as well.¹
- AS A RESULT – once these basic principles were put into regular practice neighborhoods became more functional, safer and more livable. Even businesses returned.

This widely accepted social theory *that problems, if not promptly dealt with, become much worse* was indeed simple - yet was so difficult to understand until cities, their elected officials, neighborhood citizens, police, sociologists and criminologists stepped out of their own paradigms and quit talking about how their neighborhoods and communities were dying and did something about it other than complain.

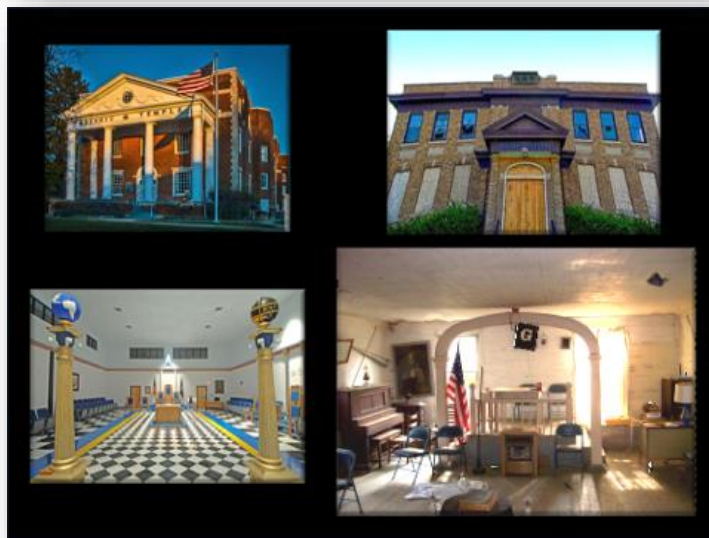
The Broken Windows Theory also offered a clear example of the domino effect as well – where one domino (or part of the system of community) falls – so falls the others.



dominos that make communities a functional system.

In communities – the run-down appearance of a neighborhood invited additional neglect, which led to disorder, which led to delinquency, leading to fear and concern for safety, then a loss of commerce and an subconscious attitude in the neighborhood suggesting nobody cares anymore – all of which threatened the very fundamentals of a functional neighborhood in our society.

Today, much of the success of what we call Community Oriented Policing (a set of police administrative and management practices) can be attributed to this major paradigm shift not only in policing, but in the way police, communities and



elected officials view their role in crime control and the appearance of their communities.

Is it possible that something analogous has been at work in Masonry for the last 60 years?

Yes - the Broken Windows Theory can easily be applied to Freemasonry

The appearance of our lodges speaks volumes to the public as well as prospective Masons, as do our websites and web presence and certainly our personal appearance when we represent our Craft.

Christopher Hodapp, in a column entitled “Broken Windows” in the Autumn 2008 issue of the *Journal of the Masonic Society*, briefly explored the connection between the broken windows theory and Masonry: He wrote:

I contend that the same [broken windows] theory can be applied to our aging, decaying Masonic buildings. The more we neglect our Temples on the outside, the more they rot spiritually on the inside, spiraling into lethargy and failure. One of the most misunderstood phrases in Masonry is that the fraternity regards the internal and not the external qualifications of a man, and we've gone on to believe it about our Temples. The truth is that what is on the outside is a reflection of what goes on inside—both in men and in buildings. We've been breaking our own windows. And it's high time we got a whuppin' for it.

Now, Brother Hodapp's writing, while on right on target, stopped short of taking the analogy beyond the condition of our many decaying Masonic buildings around the country.

His well-stated and troubling analogy can go *much, much* further.

When reframing the broken windows theory and relating it to the paradigm in which Freemasonry finds itself, one must, of course, extend the theory beyond the field of crime.

There is no *statutory crime* as such in the decline of Masonry, but some of the principles of the broken windows theory are undoubtedly applicable.

If we look, as we should, at Freemasonry systemically (its mechanics, that is, not the core ideologies of the institution), it can be thought of as being in the same condition as the decaying neighborhoods that led to Wilson's and Kelling's seminal work.

Our windows are broken, in the sense that the mechanics of *how* and *what* we practice, instruct, and pass on to subsequent generations has significantly decayed along with our level of fundamental and ongoing educational work and moral instruction – along with the general awareness of our factual – not our evidence troubled and romanticized historical origins.

There is confusion, as Dwight Smith so aptly noted in his powerful 1962 essay, “Why this Confusion in the Temple?” as to *why* there is decay not only seen in our lodge facilities, but our practices in the first place. But it's really not as confusing today as it may have appeared to Smith and many others in the 1960s.

Decay, in this respect, relates to Masonry's fixation on attempting to reverse the decline in membership, but its inability to stop the revolving door of members coming and leaving. This obsession steadily deflects us from putting equal energy into retention efforts and engaging men early in the workings of the lodge AND doing those things WE KNOW TODAY that mean are looking for when they knock on the West Gate.

The decay is a result of our fraternity focusing much too long on and pointing the finger of blame on EXTERNAL CAUSES for our membership decline while largely ignoring the INTERNAL CAUSES.

Where cities and communities ignored the *little problems* of broken glass, litter and graffiti, and general appearance, Freemasonry has discreditably ignored the “little problems” that has led to greater problems such as:

- lodges only being able to do work when open to the Master Mason degree;
- inconsistent or little Masonic education
- slowly adopting the mindset that ritual is education;
- over-prompted ritual and slovenly floor work;
- a neglect of practicing those things that we know assure high retention in favor of adopting the ill-perceived strategy that our purpose is to keep the membership rolls high;
- losing traditions as they relate to fellowship opportunities inside and outside the lodge; and

- basically, failing to keep our lodges looking like they are what a Masonic lodge *should* look like.

A sense of unavoidable deterioration that leads people to abandon the lodge infects not only our membership - but the communities in which the lodges are located - and the general public's perspective towards Freemasonry as an institution.

Just like veteran police officers who didn't need Wilson or Kelling to tell them that broken windows speed the decay of neighborhoods and increase crime because they dealt with it every day. There are also many Blue Lodge Masons who recognize our broken windows.

They easily see the deterioration of our facilities and the corresponding deterioration of the genuine practice of Freemasonry *as the system* it is intended to be.

There are pockets of lodges and men throughout North America who are *laboring to fix the broken windows*.

Hodapp is spot-on when he writes that one of the most misunderstood phrases in Masonry is that *it is the internal, not the external, qualifications of a man that Masonry regards*, and relates that to the decaying state of some Masonic lodges.

What goes on inside the lodges is indeed the key, but their outer appearance also shapes men's thinking and attitudes about more than just our buildings.

We have clearly debased a core principal of our fraternity when we say, *"It is the internal qualifications not the external that Masonry regards..."* and then fail to consider and fully recognize that outward behavior and appearance is indeed a strong indicator of the internal qualifications of any man and certainly our practices inside our lodge buildings.

As in any paradigm shift, particularly the one occurring within Freemasonry today, comes a need to recalibrate thinking and attitudes. And those attitudes have indeed caused a *domino effect* in our institution.

Our West Gate when less protected creates a fall toward the domino marked ritual proficiency - then Masonic education - then institution knowledge - then protocol, etiquette - fellowship and certainly the quality of our leadership... until all the weight of the categories of the fallen dominos threaten the last standing upright position of the entire system of Freemasonry itself.

Anyone who seriously believes the domino effect, especially since the 1960s, has not diluted, and narrowed the importance and prominence of Freemasonry - is simply not paying attention - or believes the center of the entire Masonic universe – or at least north American Freemasonry rests exclusively within the walls of their parochial lodge.

As Wilson and Kelling pointed out in the Broken Windows Theory, ignoring the little problems creates a sense of decline that leads many people to slowly drift away and ultimately abandon their community. The same consequence has infected our fraternity since the 1960s.

When the windows of our facilities are literally or figuratively broken, and the appearance and state of our lodges are in drastic need of attention, why would one consider the practice of the Craft inside those lodges to be much different?

We allowed Freemasonry to become less than the extraordinary institution it was designed to be.

I'm not implying brothers that every Lodge ought to be an elaborate marble structure with stained glass and a pipe organ.

But how do you attract candidates (much less retain them) when the Lodge has peeling paint or boarded-up windows, upswept floors, full trash cans, restrooms that appear comparable to those found in bus stations, cigarette butts littering the entrance, cobwebs in corners, carpets that are threadbare, and lights with bulbs that need changing?

But, how do you keep members interested and coming back if there is no education for which they came, few fellowship opportunities, ritual that is uninspiring, leadership that is hollow and an atmosphere that is so casual that it contributes to the making of more casual-Masons.

This is not the fault of Freemasonry as an institution, but the fault of Masons who condone or allows idleness, shortcuts, which eventually license a certain apathy to creep into their practice and allows a disheveled appearance of the lodge wherein the work of Freemasonry is supposed to be performed and exist.

The practice of such things makes them perpetual.

Abraham Lincoln faced with some thorny issue that could be settled by a twist of language asked his questioner how many legs would a dog have, if we called the dog's tail, a leg. "Five!" the questioner responded - confident in his mathematical ability to do simple addition.

"No," Lincoln says. "Calling a dog's tail a leg, does not make it a leg."

This lesson of this story is applicable to what we see in many areas of North America today regarding our Craft.

We hear men say and firmly believe today that the Masonry - everything they practice in their lodge is the same as has been practiced for almost 3 centuries.

Yet factually, we find the practices of Freemasonry has slowly shifted in the past 6 decades alone and largely redefined by the majority who practiced it during that time – AND since Morgan Affair in 1826 many of those shifts and definitions came with the underlying intent to curry favor with the public in hopes of making our fraternity more "acceptable" with an emphasis on tactics that would hopefully swell or at least maintain our dwindling membership rolls at high levels *as if* that alone would illustrate our relevance.

We all are quite aware that innovations are not permitted in our Craft – which is further evidence and a strong indicator we are supposed to operate as the system as originally designed.

Yet we have seen what is clearly recognizable - and is easily described as retrogressive innovation taking place since 1826, manifesting in the 1960s-80s with its rippling effects still occurring today.

And, while we know nothing innovative can be introduced into Freemasonry, we seem to think it's perfectly acceptable to take away from that which has been well-defined and previously established - to reduce the significance of the importance of practicing all the elements, part or parts, in our profession and still have the audacity to call it Freemasonry.

We can call our fraternity *Freemasonry* today, but unless practiced more closely with the blueprints originally designed, we become the point of the moral in the story about Lincoln and the dog's tail – *just calling a dog's tail a leg does not make it so.*

And thus - just saying we practice Freemasonry does not make it so.

It is clear - there are indeed jurisdictions who by all accounts - do much better than others. Those doing better have:

- vibrant research lodges;
- well maintained education-based websites, and first-class state-wide publications centered around education – not just announcements;
- strong community outreach programs assuring communities are strengthened by a Masonic presence;
- regular Masonic leadership conferences, academies, and seminars, that help men become more than ceremonial heads; and,
- strategic planning that can endure and move forward beyond just one year to the next.

Lodges in these jurisdictions seem to always stand out strongly suggesting Freemasonry is practiced as a system.

Masonry did not evolve overnight into what we see today – it took several generations of members to bring that about. It will take several more generations of Masons to effectively reinvest that which has been divested from our fraternity.

There are, as I have mentioned, pockets of men in lodges throughout North America who do employ - or come very close to employing the system of Freemasonry. These pockets and the number of men that comprise them is small.

Yet - it is the practices in these pockets of lodges – lodges that have adopted what we commonly classify today Traditional Observance or European Concept or Best Practice Lodges that genuinely keep the model and example of the genuine blueprint and authentic system of Masonry alive for future generations.

This pocket of lodges stepped up to the present by returning to the past by:

- re-adopting and practicing the traditions that have, over decades been lost, ignored, or in

² Attribution for the phrase: *We cannot make fine porcelain out of bad clay* is attributed to the RW Thomas W. Jackson.

some cases, unknown to casual Masons who are unaware of our rich history; and,

- rejecting the notion that bigger is better.

These lodges also maintain a strict guard on the West Gate - one that reinforces and affirms the fact that *we cannot make fine porcelain out of bad clay.*²

Freemasonry did not become the greatest organization conceived by the mind of man by lowering our standards and sacrificing our principles in order to receive greater numbers or curry favor with the rest of society.³

No, brethren... the system of Freemasonry became what it became due to our earliest commitments to remain faithful to and maintain those qualities, traditions, and practices of the entire system of Masonry - and to assure our external appearances in all manners – appropriately and fittingly reflects our internal practices.

Will this pocket of lodges *of which I speak* “fix” all the problems facing an institution that has slowly fragmented in their practices over decades? Will it eventually become fashionable for all lodges to more closely align themselves to the past?

The answer is *NO* to both questions – what these lodges are doing is not promoted as a cure-all, however they are indeed the correct a remedy for the many men who seek a Masonic experience beyond the ordinary.

It is likely these pockets will always remain a minority in North America, but Masonic historians in the future, will certainly count these pockets of lodges among the reasons that Freemasonry - as a complete system - survived this century.

In closing-

I encourage you to take stock of the appearance of your lodge and spend time and engage in constructive - balanced discussion as to whether lodge externally reflects the internal - not only in the physical sense, but the sense of the Masonic spirit and intentions of a brilliantly devised system that works best when practiced as a complete system

³ Thomas W. Jackson attribution

Ask frequently if you are you reading the blueprints correctly and are you practicing the system as it was intended?

You might also consider frequently asking if your lodge and your membership are anything like the 5 blind men who only see parts of the elephant thus having only a partial perspective of the whole – and if so, get busy and do something about it.

Brethren, we have seen neighborhoods and communities all over our country turn around and become vibrant over the last 3 decades largely by adopting and practicing the principles of the Broken Windows Theory – they effectively addressed the “little problems,” and by doing so they also taught the next generation to do the same.

The equivalent *can be done* in our fraternity.

Yes, our broken windows can be repaired - and our Craft moved - at least closer to the *system* it has always been intended to be – but not without three fundamental things in place that have been missing most - over the past 60 years that most effectively begin to address those “*little problems.*”

NUMBER ONE: A well-designed, perhaps even mandated, ongoing uniform curriculum of Masonic education that truly educates men about the factual history of our Craft, its purpose, and profound lessons designed to engender self-improvement - and consistently instructing the fact and point that Freemasonry is to be practiced as a complete system.

NUMBER TWO: A qualified, visionary, and authentic leadership elected on merit as originally intended.

NUMBER THREE: A consistent and firm guard on the West Gate.

We cannot make fine porcelain out of bad clay any more than we can ever expect our lodges to attract and retain men when the external appearance and internal practices are poor, casual, and remain in desperate need of applying all the principles of the Broken Windows Theory.

your 159th Annual Communication - and to the esteemed brethren and guests in attendance for your attention and warm hospitality.

Sources

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My thanks to the Most Worshipful Grand Master for the invitation and opportunity to speak today at