

NEWS for November 2026
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Greetings Sir Knights!

I would like to share a subject that combines American history with timeless moral instruction—George Washington's *110 Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation*.

Many people assume these rules were written by George Washington. They were not. Around the age of 14, young George Washington carefully copied them by hand into a notebook as part of his education. The rules originated much earlier, having been adapted from a set of French maxims written by the Jesuits in the late sixteenth century.

Why did Washington copy them? In his day, copying such works was a method of learning. It was not simply handwriting practice; it was character training. Every rule encouraged self-discipline, humility, respect, and consideration for others. Whether intentionally or not, these principles became woven into Washington's character. Years later, they helped shape the man who would become Commander of the Continental Army, the first President of the United States, and one of our most respected Masonic Brothers.

Although the Rules of Civility are not Masonic in origin, they harmonize remarkably well with the teachings of our fraternity. I'd like to explore several of those parallels.

Respect for Others
Washington's very first rule states: *"Every action done in company ought to be with some sign of respect to those that are present."*

That simple statement reminds us that respect is not merely expressed in words. It is demonstrated through our conduct. Freemasonry teaches the same principle. Whether we meet upon the level, salute the East, or conduct ourselves in open Lodge, our ceremonies continually remind us that respect is the foundation upon which harmony is built.

A Mason should never ask, "What respect am I owed?" Instead, he should ask, "How may I show respect to those around me?"

Guarding Our Speech
Another rule says:

***"Speak not when others speak."* Simple advice. Yet how often do we interrupt, speak over others, or prepare our response before truly listening? Freemasonry teaches us to govern not only our actions but our words. The tongue can build friendships—or destroy them. Our ritual frequently reminds us that harmony depends upon our ability to control ourselves before attempting to influence others. Listening is one of the greatest acts of respect we can offer another person.**

Humility

Washington wrote: *"Think before you speak."* And another: *"Be not hasty to believe flying reports."*

Those lessons are just as important today as they were over two hundred years ago. In a world filled with instant communication and social media, we often react before we reflect. Freemasonry asks us to be men of careful judgment. To seek truth before opinion. To measure our words. To avoid gossip. To preserve harmony. Humility begins by admitting that we may not know the whole story.

Charity

Several of Washington's rules encourage kindness toward others, especially those less fortunate. Freemasonry teaches exactly the same lesson. Relief is one of the principal tenets of our fraternity. Charity is more than giving money. It is giving patience. Giving forgiveness. Giving encouragement. Sometimes the greatest act of charity is simply extending grace to another Brother who is struggling.

Self-Control

One of Washington's rules advises us: *"When angry, count ten before you speak."* While those exact words are not found in our ritual, the lesson certainly is. Freemasonry teaches us to subdue our passions. That phrase is familiar to every Mason. Strength is not measured by how loudly we speak. It is measured by how well we govern ourselves. The man who masters his temper has accomplished something far greater than mastering another man.

Industry and Improvement

Washington believed a gentleman should never stop improving himself. Freemasonry teaches the same philosophy. Our working tools are symbols of continual labor. Not merely physical labor—but labor upon ourselves. Every degree asks the same question in a different way: "What kind of man are you becoming?" That question never ends. Even after fifty years as a Mason, the answer should still be: "I am still learning."

Leadership Through Example

George Washington rarely demanded respect. He earned it. His soldiers followed him because they trusted him. His country believed him because he lived consistently. Freemasonry expects the same from its officers. Whether we serve as Sentinel or High Priest, Master or Grand Officer, our authority comes not from the jewel we wear but from the example we set. Good leadership begins with good character.

Why These Rules Still Matter

It would be easy to dismiss Washington's Rules of Civility as outdated etiquette. But if we look beyond the language, we discover something deeper. Respect. Humility. Integrity. Self-control. Charity. Truthfulness. These virtues never become obsolete. They are just as necessary inside a Masonic Lodge today as they were in Washington's lifetime. Perhaps that is why Washington's example continues to inspire Masons around the world.

Closing Thoughts

I would like to leave you with this thought. The Rules of Civility did not make George Washington a Mason. Freemasonry did not create the Rules of Civility. Yet both seek to accomplish something remarkably similar. They seek to build good men. One rule at a time. One lesson at a time. One decision at a time. As Masons, we often speak about making good men better. George Washington reminds us that becoming better rarely happens through one great act. It happens through hundreds of small decisions—to speak kindly, to listen

carefully, to act honestly, to lead humbly, and to treat every person with dignity and respect.

If we practice even a handful of those principles with consistency, we will honor not only the example of Brother George Washington, but also the principles of the Craft itself.

In His Name,

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