

Serious Considerations on Trade (1758)

by John Woolman

John Woolman's sermon emphasizes the necessity of conducting trade with pure wisdom to promote community harmony and avoid the pitfalls of greed.

Scripture: Matthew 5:9, Romans 12:18, 1 Corinthians 10:31, Philippians 4:11, Colossians 3:17, James 3:17

Topics: "Christian Living", "Peaceful Existence"

Description

John Woolman, in his essay 'Serious Considerations on Trade,' emphasizes the importance of living righteously and in unity as one family under Christ's light. He discusses the dangers of customs and practices that go against pure wisdom, leading to unnecessary toil, discord, and conflicts within the family of humanity. Woolman urges for a harmonious and peaceful existence, where individuals prioritize simplicity, contentment, and true love over selfish desires and pursuits of wealth. He highlights the significance of maintaining a spirit of peace, doing God's will, and fostering genuine fellowship among brethren.

Transcript

Gummere's introduction:

"This essay, hitherto unpublished, is found at the back of the folio, MS. A. and occupies pages one to four, inclusive. The following note of John Woolman's, which prefaces it, throws light upon the extremes of caution which prevented entirely the publication of this Essay, and delayed others until after the author's death. This note also gives us a new date for the Essay on "Considerations on Pure Wisdom," etc. as noted in the introduction to that Essay.

'When that small piece entitled Considerations on pure wisdom etc. [printed 1758] was laid before the overseers of the press. The substance of the following twelve distinct paragraphs were formed in one Chapter, and proposed by me to have been corrected and printed as a part of that piece. But the Overseers, though they did not reject this Chapter, yet exprest some desire that the publication of it might at least be deferred, which which I felt easie, and therefore they did not attempt to correct it." This comment was written by John Woolman in 1769.'

"At the end are notes "From a Surgeon's Journal," and selections which are all taken from Anthony Benezet's "Caution and Warning to Great Britain and her Colonies," etc. They are therefore not included here."

The Webmeister's comment: to my knowledge, this piece has not been reprinted since Gummere's edition, in 1922 (until now, of course.) Enjoy!

SERIOUS CONSIDERATIONS ON TRADE

by John Woolman

1

As it hath pleased the Divine Being to people the Earth by Inhabitants descended from one man; And as Christ commanded his disciples to preach the Gospel to distant Countries, the necessity of sometimes crossing the Seas is evident.

2

The Inhabitants of the Earth have often appeared to me as one great family consisting of various parts, divided by great waters, but united in one common Interest, that is, in living righteously according to that Light and understanding, wherewith Christ doth enlighten every man that cometh into the world.

3

While a Wilderness is improving, by Inhabitants come fro a plentiful thick settled Country, to Employ some of the family in crossing the waters, to supply new settlers, with some such necessities as they cam well pay for, while they clear Fields to raise grain, appears to be consistent with the Interest of all -

4

When lands are so improved that with a Divine Blessing they afford food, Raiment, and all those necessities which pertain to the Life of a humble follower of Christ; It behoves the Inhabitants to take heed that a Custom be not continued longer than the usefulness of it, and that the number of that calling who have been helpful in importing Necessaries be not greater than is consistent with pure wisdom.

5

Customs contrary to pure wisdom, which tends to change agreeable employ into a Toyl, and to involve people into many difficulties, it appears to be the duty of the Fathers in the family, to wait for strength, to labour against such customs being introduced, or encouraged among the Inhabitants; and that all true friends to the family so shake their hands from holding Bribes, as not to cherish any desire of gain, by fetching, or selling, those tings which they believe tend to Alienate the minds of people from their truest Interest.

6

Where some have got large possessions, and by an increase of Inhabitants have power to acquire riches, if they let them at such a rate that their Tenants are necessitated in procuring their rent to labour harder or apply themselves to business more closely, than is consistent with pure wisdom, whither these monies thus obtained, are applied to promote superfluous Trade, or any other purpose in a self pleasing will, here the true harmony of the family appears to be in danger.

7

Where two branches of the same family are each scituate on such a Soil, that with moderate labour, through the Divine Blessing, each may be supplied by their own produce with all the necessaries of life, and a large hazardous Ocean between them; for the Inhabitants of each place to live on the produce of their own land, appears most likely for the to shun unnecessary cares and labours.

8

For Brethren to Visit each other in true love, I believe makes part of that happiness which our heavenly father intends for us in this life; but where pure Wisdom direct not our Visits, we may not suppose them truly profitable; And for man to so faithfully attend to the pure light, as to be truly acquainted with the state of his own mind, and feel that purifying power which prepares the heart to have fellowship with Christ, and with those who are redeemed from the Spirit of this world, this knowledge is to us of infinitely greater moment than the knowledge of Affairs in distant parts of this great family.

9

By giving way to a desire after delicacies, and things fetched from any men appear to be employed unnecessarily; many Ships built by much labour are lost; many people brought to an untimely end; much good produce buried in the Seas; Many people bruised in that which serves chiefly to please a wandering desire, who might better be employed in those Affairs which are of real service, and ease the burdens of such poor honest people, who to answer the demands of others are often necessitated to exceed the bound of healthful agreeable exercise.

10

Blessed are the peace makers, for they shall be called the Children of GOD.

Where one in the family is injured, it appears consistent with true Brotherhood, that such who know it, take due care respecting their own behavior, and conduct, lest the love of gain should lead them into any affairs, so connected with the proceedings of him who doth the injury, as to strengthen his hands therein, make him more at ease in a wrong way, or less likely to Attend to the Righteous principle in his own mind.

11

To be well acquainted with the Affairs we are interested in, with the disposition of those with whom we have connexions, to have outward concerns within proper bounds, and in all things attend to the wisdom from above, appears most agreeable to that pious disposition in which people desire to shun doubtful disputes about property, to have their proceedings so agreeable to Righteousness, that whatsoever they do, they may do all to the Glory of God, and give none Offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of Christ.

12

When men give way to a desire after wealth, and to obtain their ends proceed in that wisdom which is from beneath, how often does discord arise between different branches of the great family? Whence great numbers of men are often separated from tilling the Earth, and useful employ, to defend what contending parties mutually claim as their interest; hence many are cut off in youth! and great trouble and devastations do often attend these contents; and besides these Sorrowful circumstances, the food these Armies eat, the Garments they wear, their Wages, Vessels to Transport them from place to place, and

Support for the maimed, tends to increase the labour of such who fill the Earth, and to make some Employments necessary which without wars would not; here that healthful agreeable exercise, which I believe our Gracious Creator intended for us, is often changed into hurry and Toyl.

O how precious is the Spirit of Peace! how desirable that state in which people feel their hearts humbly resigned to the Lord, and live under a labour of mind to do his will on Earth as it is done in heaven. Where they feel content with that rue simplicity in which no wandering desires leads on to Strife, where no treasures possess in a selfish Spirit, tends to beget ill will in other selfish men. And where true Love so seasons their proceedings, that the pure witness is reached in such who are well acquainted with them.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-woolman/serious-considerations-on-trade-1758/>

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