

From the Journal of John Woolman (1720 – 1772)

Speaking Truth

“I find that to be a fool as to worldly wisdom, and to commit my cause to God, not fearing to offend men who take offense at the simplicity of truth, is the only way to remain unmoved at the sentiments of others.”

In the heat of zeal, I made reply to what an ancient Friend said, and when I sat down, I saw that my words were not enough seasoned with charity... Sometime after this, I remained uneasy with the manner of my speaking, and could not see my way clear to conceal my uneasiness, though I was concerned that I might say nothing to weaken the cause in which I had labored. After some close exercise and repentance for not having attended closely to the safe guide, I stood up, and reciting the passage, acquainted friends that, though I durst not go from what I had said, yet I was uneasy with the manner of my speaking. As this was uttered in some degree of creaturely abasement after a warm debate, it appeared to have a good savor amongst us.

About this time an ancient man of good esteem in the neighborhood came to my house to get his will written. He had young Negroes and I asked him privately how he proposed to dispose of them. He told me; I then said “I cannot write thy will without breaking my peace”, and respectfully gave him my reasons for it. He signified that he had a choice that I should’ve written it, but as I could not consistent with my conscience, he did not desire it and so he got it written by some other person...A few years later... he came again. His negroes were still young and his son, to whom he intended to give them was, since he first spoke to me, from a libertine become a sober young man, he supposed that I would have been free on that account to write it. We had much friendly talk on the subject and then deferred. A few days after he came again and directed their freedom. And I then wrote his will.

Five Questions

1. What is the author’s main point in this passage? **This question gets at what the author's point is, not what you would like it to be.** (Main Point)
2. What new light do I find in this particular reading of this passage of text? **New light may be great or small.** (New Light)
3. How is this passage true **or not true** to my experience? (Truth)
4. What are the implications of this passage for my life? (Implications)
5. What problems do I have with this passage? (Problems)