

# THE BULWARK

## ONE AT A TIME

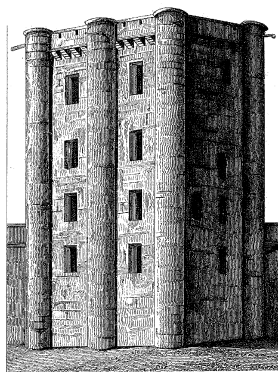
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*“Mark well her bulwarks,  
consider her palaces, that  
you may tell it to the  
generation following”*  
Psalms 48:13

John Woolman was born into a Quaker family in 1720. He grew up to become an itinerant preacher as well as a merchant. History, however, will remember him as a man who embarked on a personal campaign to end slavery in colonial America. Woolman would meet with slave owners and share with them the injustice of holding other human beings as a commodity to be bought and sold. He wasn't successful in his efforts to fully eradicate slavery, but he was able to persuade numerous slave owners to set free their slaves. Whatever success he was able to bring about, was the result of individual conviction and personal entreaty. He went about his work, seeking to free all, but content to free one at a time.

In the short letter of Philemon, Paul makes a personal appeal. Onesimus was a runaway slave who had escaped from his owner, Philemon, who was a christian. Paul had been able to teach Onesimus the gospel and he rendered obedience, now Paul was sending him back to Philemon. *“For perhaps he was for this reason parted from you for a while, that you should have him back forever, no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.”* (15-16) While it is not known if Onesimus was set free from his slavery, his putting Christ on in the waters of baptism changed his relationship with Philemon. They were now brothers in Christ. Paul may not have been able to set all the slaves free, he was doing what he could, one at a time.

In the book “Chicken Soup For The Soul” a story is told about a man walking along a beach at low tide that was riddled with starfish. As he walked, he would pick one up and toss it back onto the ocean, thus saving it from predators. Another man observed what he was doing said, “there's no way you can save them all, so what good does that do?” The man, stooping over and tossing another one back into the ocean replied, “it did good for that one.”

Mankind is caught up in the grip of slavery. Slavery to sin. The only way to be set free from this bondage is through the blood of Christ *“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.”* (Romans 8:2, see also Romans 6:17-18)

*“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to every one who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”* (Romans 1:16) There is no doubt as to the saving power of God's word, however not all will respond. That does not diminish our recognition of the responsibility to do what we can on a one on one basis. While it is true there were instances where great multitudes rendered obedience, those proved to be the exception rather than the rule.

It is amazing what the influence and teaching of one person can have on others. The kindest thing you can do for others is to show them the truth of the gospel which can remove the shackles of sin (see John 8:31-32) (wbe)