

ILL WINDS

WINDS OF DOCTRINE 1



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A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Ill Winds: Winds of Doctrine 1
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Ill Winds

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Welcome to *Ill Winds*

The Christian life can be compared to a sailing vessel, blown along by the Wind of God toward its course of sanctification and glory.

And like any sailing ship, the fuller our sails are with the right kind of wind, the smoother will be our sailing and the sooner we will reach our destination.

But ill winds abound in our day, and they can cause us to drift off course, lose our way, and ultimately become shipwrecked in our faith, if only for a season.

It's important that we be able to recognize the various winds that are seeking to fill the sails of our soul. In this series, *Winds of Doctrine*, we'll consider some of the more persistent and dangerous breezes through which we must navigate in our journey with the Lord.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Deceptive Winds

When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete. But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Eurochylon. Acts 27.13, 14

Failure to heed

So begins the familiar story of the shipwreck that brought Paul to Malta on his journey to Rome. Those in charge of this voyage, and responsible for the loss of cargo and vessel, responded to the wrong wind. Paul, obviously moved by the Spirit of God, had counseled them not to venture forth from the harbor at Fair Havens, for he knew that “sailing was now dangerous” (vv. 9, 10). It seems he had an impression from the Holy Spirit – a gentle but clear breeze of revelation – which he felt he must share with the captain and the centurion.

But they chose not to listen to Paul. Instead, when they perceived a gentle wind wafting up from the south, which they agreed would give them what they desired (v. 13), they decided that this was the wind they should rely on and follow. So they hoisted their sails into what seemed a friendly enough wind, and put out to sea, sailing close by Crete – just in case.

But, as is often the case, the wind suddenly changed from gentle and southerly to tempestuous and deadly. The Greek text tells us it was a *Euraquilon* – not a *Eurochylon*, as in NKJV. The *Eurochylon* is a southeasterly wind, strong enough to make waves and hinder progress, but not strong enough necessarily to ruin a ship. A *Euraquilon*, by contrast, is what we in New England refer to as a Nor’easter, a strong, steady, and increasingly violent wind from the northeast, driven by a low pressure cell and capable of terrible damage.

That this was the wind which suddenly engulfed the vessel in which Paul was being transported is clear from the fact that soon the ship was being driven hard toward the southwest. So strong was the wind that the crew feared the ship might be shaken to pieces, so they put girding cables underneath (v. 17). As the wind grew stronger, they had to throw the cargo overboard, to get the hull of the ship up out of the water, and hopefully to improve steering (v. 18). This violence went on “for many days”; for fourteen straight days the crew battled to keep the ship afloat, not even stopping to eat (vv. 20, 27).

But all was for naught. They ended up ramming the ship onto a reef, shattering it to pieces (v. 41). Had it not been for Paul’s advice – a firm wind of the Spirit in the midst of a ruinous tempest – and the grace of God, all hands and all the company on that ship would have been lost.

All because those responsible failed to discern the true wind, and decided to follow the wind of their desires instead.

The winds are still blowing

Paul may have had this incident in mind when he wrote to the churches in Ephesus to guard against being “tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting” (Eph. 4.14). He knew that ill winds of doctrine were blowing throughout the Roman Empire of his day. And he also knew the damage those winds could inflict. Even some who seemed to have believed the Gospel could end up shipwreck because they hoisted their sails into ill winds, rather than keep to the true winds of God’s Spirit and Word (1 Tim. 1.18-20).

The ill winds of doctrine seeking to entice the sails of the churches in Paul’s day were of many different kinds. There were ill winds of political self-interest, which sought to enlist religion for the benefit of personal advancement within the Roman world. Such may have been the winds of the Nicolaitans, warned about in Revelation 2.6, 15, who, like Balaam of old, tried to harmonize his religious vocation with political interests.

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The ill winds of Judaism – secular and religious – blew at the churches Paul started and served, seeking to trap believers into false assurances and to a form of salvation that minimized the place of Jesus. In many cases, these ill winds blew so hard, so continuously, and with such threatening force, that many believers began to drift from their great salvation (Heb. 2.1-3).

Ill winds of docetic Gnosticism, denying the true bodily incarnation of Christ, also wafted through the intellectual air, and John had to address them head-on in his first epistle.

Other ill winds – such as those of the infamous Jezebel of Revelation 2.20 – taught that sin was not a big deal, that you could believe in Jesus and do whatever you liked in the way of sexual practice and even dabbling with other forms of religion. The Corinthians, it seems, sought to sail by this ill wind (1 Cor. 5).

Some winds looked to religion as a way of becoming a person of prestige, or perhaps even wealth (Acts 8.9-20).

The ill wind of the religion of Rome and the deity of Caesar blew throughout the world in Paul's day, so much so that, when the people of Thessalonica heard that Christians looked to Jesus as their King, they panicked, fearing Roman retribution (Acts 17.6-8).

Ill winds still

All these various ill winds of doctrine were cunning – they seemed like gentle breezes, capable of satisfying some desire. But they were also crafty, in that they blew in a direction designed to shape the lives of those who sailed by them in ways other than what God intended. They were deceitful as well, because they could present themselves as sounding so reasonable, so true, and so widely embraced.

All these ill winds of doctrine threatened to keep Christians from growing into maturity in Christ, by constantly distracting them from their course, impeding their journey in the Lord, and causing them to live by lies rather than by the truth.

Ill winds of doctrine continue to blow in our day. If anything, they are more, and more intense, than in the days that Paul ministered. Unless we can discern these ill winds, and set our sails against rather than into them, we run the risk of ending up with a faith that has little power to glorify God or satisfy our souls.

But how can we recognize these ill winds? And what must we do to resist them, and to keep the sails of our faith hoisted squarely in the wind of the Holy Spirit? In this series, *Winds of Doctrine*, we'll try to answer those and other questions, as we consider the ill winds of doctrine, blowing in our day, and learn how to keep our sails trimmed into the wind of God's Word and Spirit.

For reflection

1. Why did Paul liken false teachings to “winds”? How should this alert us?
2. What do you think are some of the most dangerous ill winds of doctrine in our day? Why?
3. How can we know when we are “hoisting the sails of our faith” into ill winds of doctrine?

Next steps – Preparation: Begin praying that God will give you the discernment to see any ill winds by which you may be conducting your life. Wait on Him in prayer daily as you allow Him to search your heart, mind, conscience, and life.

2 The Wind from God

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. 1 Corinthians 2.12

Blows where He will

All who believe in Jesus Christ have the Spirit of God dwelling in them. If you believe in Jesus, and look to Him for salvation and life, then the Spirit of God is in you; because, only the Spirit of God can bring you to this place of being able to believe and confess God as your true and only Father (Gal. 4.6). Because the Spirit of God dwells in us, we have become temples of God, focal points for worship, holiness, glory, mission, and the joy of the Lord (1 Cor 6.19).

Jesus likened the Holy Spirit to a Wind from God: “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (Jn. 3.8). Indeed, in both the Hebrew and Greek languages, the same word that means “spirit” can also mean “wind” or “breath.” Believers in Jesus Christ have the very Breath of God breathing within them, breathing thoughts, affections, and holy spiritual power to transform us increasingly into the likeness of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18), so that we might glorify God in all the everyday moments and activities of our lives (1 Cor. 10.31).

Because the Spirit of God is in us, we can *know the things that have been freely given to us by God*. Let us not fail to see what a glorious privilege, noble calling, and thrilling portent are contained in those words. God has given us things which we can know, that is, understand, embrace, assimilate, adopt, perform, and proclaim. By giving us His Word, God opens to us the mysteries of our great salvation, that we might know the full freedom of the sons and daughters of God, to live in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. By His Word He opens to us full understanding into the world around us, that we might see it as His handiwork, receive as His gift, use it as His stewards, and join with it our voices to praise and thank our God. He has given us His Church, the Body of Christ on earth, of which we are members, and for the building of which He has gifted us each one with holy spiritual abilities that carry us forward in seeking His Kingdom and glory.

We have the Spirit of God. The Breath of God heaves within us. The Wind of God blows upon us. The Spirit of God operates to renew our spirit in the likeness of Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God within us is powerful. He is able to do exceedingly abundantly more than all that we could ever ask or think in making us willing and able to do that which realizes the pleasure of God (Eph. 3.20; Phil. 2.13).

But we must be able to identify this holy and powerful Wind from the Lord, that we might incline faithfully toward it. And to that end, we will look to Jonathan Edwards for guidance.

The wind of the Spirit

In his sermon, “Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God,” Jonathan Edwards helps us identify the Wind of God, so that we may hoist the sails of our vessel of faith into the jet stream of His power. Edwards noted five marks in particular that identify the true Wind of God.

First, where the Wind of God is blowing and the Breath of God is heaving, esteem for Jesus increases, as the Spirit “seems more to confirm and establish” our minds in “the truth of what the Gospel declares to us of His being the Son of God, and the Savior of men.” Growing in love for Jesus, looking more constantly to Him, desiring to be made more like Him, and to take up His calling for us – these are sure signs that the Wind of God is filling our sails and directing our course.

Second, Edwards notes, “When the spirit that is at work operates against the interests of Satan’s kingdom,

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which lies in encouraging and establishing sin, and cherishing man's worldly lusts; this is a sure sign that it is a true, and not a false spirit." The Holy Spirit is a sanctifying Spirit; He leads us to hate sin and to love righteousness; to deny fleshly and selfish lusts and to seek only what pleases and honors God.

Third, "The spirit that operates in such a manner, as to cause in men a greater regard to the Holy Scriptures, and establishes them more in their truth and divinity, is certainly the Spirit of God." As the Spirit fills your sails and breathes through your soul, your love for the Word of God will increase, so that you will regard the Scriptures as "the joy and rejoicing" of your heart (Jer. 15.16).

Fourth, the Spirit of God is the Spirit of truth. He makes us hungry for truth, to know all things, everything that pertains to our lives in this world, from the vantage point of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom. The Spirit of God works to convince us "of those things that are true" and in accord with God's Word and will. No wonder Jesus calls His followers "disciples", for the root of this word means "learner" – one who, by the indwelling Spirit of God – hungers for the truth of God (Jn. 17.21).

Finally, Edwards explained, "If the spirit that is at work among a people operates as a spirit of love to God and man, it is a sure sign that it is the Spirit of God." The goal of all Christian instruction is love, wrote Paul (1 Tim. 1.5); thus, we can know the Spirit is filling the sails of our soul, and we are breathing with the very Breath of God, as the wake of our journey leaves a trail of love wherever we go.

The winds of this world

These five marks indicate the breathing, blowing, empowering, and transforming Presence of the Spirit of God: Love for Jesus, hatred of sin, increasing desire for God's Word, commitment to God's truth, and devotion to loving God and neighbors. This is the Spirit Who lives in everyone who believes in Jesus, and Who breathes and blows upon our souls to make us more like Him.

But this is not the spirit blowing across the face of the world in our day. The high and holy jet stream of the Spirit of God is being undermined by prevailing winds of a different sort, and the majority of the peoples of the world have hoisted their sails into these. It is no wonder that regard for Jesus is in decline, that indulgence in all manner of sinfulness is increasing, that God's Word is neglected and scorned, that the reality of truth is regarded as a matter of private choice, and that love for neighbors has been replaced by love for self and tribe.

The people among whom believers must make their journey in life have raised their sails into contrary winds; and the temptation is very great – given the overall direction of the vast majority of people – to hoist our canvas into those winds as well, thinking that we can sail both by the Wind of God and winds of the world.

Only as we recognize both the character of God's true Wind, and the deceitful, dangerous, and deadly winds of the world, can we avoid becoming shipwrecked on the hidden reefs of sin and defeated in our journey to know, love, and serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

For reflection

1. Why is "Wind" or "Breath" a good way to think about the Spirit of God?
2. Why is it important to understand the "marks" of the Spirit's blowing?
3. How can we know if our "sails" have become captive to the winds of the world?

Next steps – Preparation: Meditate on Edwards' five marks of the Spirit. Which of these do you need to know more of in your own life?

3 The Sails of the Soul

Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. 1 Peter 2.11, 12

Full sail

A well-trimmed sailing vessel employs a variety of sails to capture and maximize the power of the wind. Think of a typical three-masted schooner or frigate. Each mast has a large mainsail and one or two topsails above it. Strung from the fore and aft masts, you may find another set of sails, either triangular or quadrilateral.

The sails work together, overlapping with one another, and they complement one another, to allow the vessel to make progress. When the sails are full and the tiller holds firm, a sailing vessel makes good progress along its course.

The soul can be compared to the masts and sails of a sailing ship. It employs three “masts” – the heart, the mind, and the conscience – which each use a variety of “sails” to keep the soul moving along in the life of faith. We in whom the soul operates to empower our walk with and work for the Lord want to keep our sails filled with the Wind from God – the Holy Spirit – so that He breathes into each of the sails of the soul those affections, thoughts, and priorities that will keep us moving forward in faith. At the same time, we must guard against any “ill winds” of false teaching, sentiment, or value, since these “war against the soul” to cause us to drift off course and compromise honorable and Christ-like conduct.

Let’s look more closely at the sails which operate from the “masts” of our soul.

The heart: the main mast

The primary mast which catches the winds that blow upon our soul is the heart. We must “guard the heart with all diligence,” Solomon wrote, “for from it are the issues of life” (Prov. 4.23, my translation). Jesus said as much, too, saying that the heart is the treasury of good or evil, depending on how we keep it (Lk. 6.45). The primary sails operating on the mast of the heart are desire, delight, and love.

We recall that Eve fell into sin as she began to desire the fruit of the tree rather than the Word and promise of God (Gen. 3.6). Her desire was to indulge a fleshly delight rather than to maintain communion with God, and thus she opened the gate of her soul to the Trojan horse of sin.

Desire works hand-in-hand with delight. We tend to desire what we think we might take delight in. Delight is a powerful affection that can easily cause us to give in to sinful desires. This is why David counsels us to delight in the Lord. If we delight in the Lord, we will desire the Lord, and He will give us more of Himself. If we delight in things other than the Lord, then that sail of our soul may fill with things that turn out to be idols and sources of drift.

Love is the attraction and conviction resulting from having what we desire and delight in. Obviously, love can become misplaced, as when Demas loved the world, and desired and took delight in its lusts, rather than in the Lord and His Kingdom (2 Tim. 4.10).

The mind: the aft mast

We often speak of having an “afterthought” about some matter. Usually, that afterthought comes as a corrective to a premature judgment. The mind is the aft mast of the soul. In one sense, it catches whatever

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wind comes to the soul before the heart, but it is not as powerful as the heart in driving the soul along its course.

The mind raises three primary sails into the winds that blow upon our souls – reception, attention, and interest. Reception welcomes prevailing winds. It acts to consider, discern, and decide which winds to receive and which to shun. Because we have received the Spirit, not of the world, but of God, we must receive only those Winds of God that are consistent with His Word (1 Cor. 2.12, 13). We need to be well aware of other winds that wish to blow against our minds, but we must not receive any except those which are of the Holy Spirit.

The sail of attention gathers the winds that blow against the soul and distributes them about, that they might be well-considered and transferred to the main mast of the heart. If we give attention to contrary winds – like Eve, pondering that fruit and deciding it was a good thing to eat – we may compromise not only our thoughts but our affections as well, leading to drift from God’s course.

Interest is a more permanent feature of the mind, and finds us probing deeper into ideas, worldviews, suggestions and the like. Interest works properly when reception and attention have done their job, because then the focus of interest will be only that which blows with the Spirit of God.

The conscience: the foremast

If there is a foremast to the soul, that which tends to lead the main and aft masts of heart and mind, it is the conscience. For the conscience is the repository of settled convictions and values. In a healthy soul, these operate to keep heart and mind filled with the Wind of God. The sails strung from the foremast of conscience are assimilation, value, priority.

By assimilation that which we have considered with the mind and embraced with the heart becomes settled in the soul, an integral part of who we are. “For me to live *is* Christ,” Paul wrote (Phil. 1.21), thus showing that he had assimilated Christ into his conscience and all of his life.

Paul thus valued Christ above all things. He counted everything else but rubbish for the joy of knowing and having Christ Jesus (Phil. 3.7-9).

Thus, Paul’s priority in everything was to glorify Christ (1 Cor. 10.31).

In a healthy soul, the mind, the heart, and the conscience seek out the Wind of God and the duties and benefits the Spirit and Word bring to us. The ill winds of doctrine are noted, but they are neither received, delighted in, nor assimilated. Instead we hoist all the sails of our soul into the Wind of doctrine that comes from God alone, centers of Jesus Christ, teaches us to hate sin and love God’s Word, and brings forth the fruit of love in us.

For reflection

1. Why should you watch over your heart with all diligence? What can happen if you don’t?
2. We have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2.16). How can we make sure that we always *think* with that mind?
3. The Law of God is the bedrock of a sound conscience. Why is that so?

Next steps – Transformation: Spend some time in prayer reviewing the state of the sails of your soul. Do you see any areas that need amending?

4 Whence? What? Whither

But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. 2 Corinthians 4.3, 4

The god of this age

Two interpretations of Paul's phrase, "the god of this age," are endorsed by Biblical scholars. The first and most common sees this phrase as referring to Satan, who was cast out of heaven and condemned to prowl the earth, lying and deceiving as many people as he could (Rev. 12.7-9), and warring against the Church of Christ with every weapon at his disposal (Rev. 12.13-17).

The second interpretation treats this phrase a little differently, yet perfectly in line with what the Greek will allow. It reads the phrase, ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος, *ho theos tou aionos*, as "the god which consists of this age." Here the emphasis is one step removed from the father of lies, and indicts all the lying and deceiving philosophies, worldviews, and religions, and the people who espouse and embrace them, which Satan blows forth over the world.

I think it's safe to say that both of these are true. The ideational air we breathe, and through which we conduct our vessels of faith toward the eternal Kingdom, abounds with half-truths, fake news, deceptions, and outright lies. Many of these are so ludicrous that no one takes them seriously. Others seem so convincing that almost everybody hoists their sails in them to one degree or another.

Ideas, opinions, views, advice, counsel, and instruction comes at us continually, all day long, through a wide variety of channels: news, advertising, school curricula, books, the Internet, podcasts, conversations, and more. There is no shortage of wind trying to lodge itself in the sails of our soul, and if we are not discerning, we may be tempted to hoist our sails into this or that seemingly friendly current, only to find ourselves rather off course from where the Wind of God would have us.

We need to ask three questions concerning every form of ideational wind that wants a piece of our soul.

Whence?

The first question is the easiest to answer. Well, it's easy in direct proportion to how faithful we are in feeding on the Word of God, delighting in His Law, hiding His Word in our heart, letting His Word dwell richly in us, and seeing Jesus everywhere we look in Scripture (Jer. 15.16; Ps. 119.97; Ps 119.9-11; Col. 3.16; Jn. 5.39). If we are well grounded in the Word of God, rooted and nourished by the living water it channels our way (Ps. 1), then we'll be better able to discern the winds blowing against us each day.

Because the first question to ask about any idea, position, thought, worldview, moral opinion, or any other notion or view is: "Whence is this?" That is, "Where does this idea come from?" Is it Biblical? Can I find this idea in Scripture? Is it consistently taught throughout God's Word? It's seeking to get my attention, attract my interest, and may entice my desire; so I need to know for sure: Is this a Word from the Wind of God, the Holy Spirit of God, speaking in Scripture?

Because if not, regardless of how you interpret 2 Corinthians 4.3, the source of that idea is from the world or the flesh or the devil. In which case, Scripture gives us one command: Submit to God and His Word, and resist the devil and his hot air (Jms. 4.7).

But you may not be able to answer this question until you've considered the second.

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What?

The apostle John tells us, in effect, to test every wind that's trying to force its energy into the sails of our soul (1 Jn. 4.1-3). That is, we need to ask, "What is the content, thrust, and promise of this idea or thought?" What is it trying to get you to do? Does the message of this idea fly in the face of something you know from Scripture? Does it seek to make you the final arbiter of truth? To hold out things as the ultimate goal of a happy life? Self as the final determinant of all right and wrong? You as the thing above all to be loved?

Or does this idea or thought harmonize with the Wind of God: Love your neighbor?. Deny yourself? Honor God not men? Seek only what is beautiful, good, and true?

One essential guideline from the Wind of the Spirit can help us here, as we begin to discern *what* of any particular idea or point of view consists of: "Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good" (Rom. 12.9).

Whither?

Finally, we need to consider the probable outcome of embracing any particular idea or suggestion: "Whither will this take me?" That is, "If I follow this line of thinking, this moral action, this interesting possibility, and if I allow it to fill the sails of my soul, will this lead me onward to Christ, or will it cause me to drift from Him?" Is this taking me forward into more of His Kingdom and salvation, or is it pushing me into the doldrums of self?

Here again, one simple guideline should suffice: "...one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3.13, 14).

What we can *not* do is to allow just *any* of the winds that blow against us to fill *any* of the sails of our soul. The winds will come at us. They will do everything they can to capture some canvas in our soul. We can't really avoid that. Martin Luther is reported to have said about temptation and sin: "You can't stop the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from making a nest in your hair."

We can't stop the winds of this age – the lies, deceptions, half-truths, reckless suggestions, and self-serving notions – from wafting across the decks of our soul. We need to recognize them for what they are – whence they've come, what they promote and promise, and whither they would take us. But we need to give our full sails only to those currents that issue from the Wind and Word of God. All the others we must recognize for what they are, and keep them from settling into any of the sails of our soul.

But recognizing deceitful winds, and keeping them out of our sails is a constant struggle. So make sure you are grounded in the Word of God, and that you are daily opening the masts of your soul to the Wind of God's Spirit. When this Wind fills your souls, you'll have neither room nor desire for any others.

For reflection

1. Would you say that your commitment to reading and studying God's Word is sufficient to guard your soul against the lying and deceitful winds of this age? Explain.
2. Our sinful self – the law of sin that remains within us (Rom. 7.21-24) – is always ready to accommodate worldly winds. How can we keep our sinful self in check?
3. How should Christians help one another in dealing with the three questions outlined here?

Next steps – Transformation: Begin asking these three questions about any idea or notion you are contemplating. Commit all your thoughts, plans, dreams, desires, and hopes to the Lord, and make sure they line up well with His Word.

5 Shrouded Truth

“And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; or in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’” Acts 17.26-28

God’s judgments

The truth of God, by which He would bless and cause us to flourish, is not hidden in arcane texts or inaccessible mountain domains. We don’t have to scale heights, cut our way through jungles, or sail to distant shores to discover the truth of God.

In fact, the truth of God – especially in the forms of His goodness, His judgments, and His glory – is all around us all the time, as three quotes from the psalms of David indicate:

For the word of the LORD *is* right,
And all His work *is done* in truth.
He loves righteousness and justice;
The earth is full of the goodness of the LORD. Psalm 33.4, 5

He is the LORD our God;
His judgments *are* in all the earth. Psalm 105.7

The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament shows His handiwork.
Day unto day utters speech,
And night unto night reveals knowledge.
There is no speech nor language
Where their voice is not heard.
Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their words to the end of the world. Psalm 19.1-4

Because all people are made in the image of God, encounters with the goodness, judgments, glory, and truth of God are common, indeed, everyday experiences. Every person who has ever lived knows God, at a certain level of being at least (Rom. 1.18-21); and that knowledge of God is ineradicable. Men suppress that knowledge by refusing to believe in God and heaping up unrighteous worldviews and ungodly ways; but the image of God and His undeniable truth remain amid the clutter and confusion of tarnished, corrupt, and lost souls.

God has written the works of His Law on the soul of every human being (Rom. 2.14, 15). So it should not surprise us to know that the ill winds that waft across our heart, mind, and conscience are not *entirely* false. The teachings, ideas, worldviews, and opinions of people, even those who do not know the Lord, cannot help but contain some measure of truth, albeit truth shrouded in the garments of the lie.

The lie Paul wrote about in Romans 1.18-32 is the teaching that rejects God and His Word, places self on the judgment throne of life, and constructs a view and an approach to life that picks and chooses to suit the fleeting whims and interests of self. Yet even such worldviews will contain grains of truth, not because all views are true, but because the truth of God impresses itself on every soul, if only in fleeting glances, through the image of God in people.

Paul in Athens

Our text comes from the middle of Paul's message to the Greek philosophers assembled on Mars Hill in Athens, which was a venue for philosophical discussion and debate, and to which Paul had been invited to present more formally the views he had been conversing about throughout the city.

In his message, Paul sought to show the superiority of Biblical thinking over the partial truths of secular philosophies, and to hold Jesus up as the culmination of all truth and the very Reason, Explanation, and End of the creation and all people.

Paul quoted approvingly from two Greek thinkers. First, he paraphrased Epimenides (fl. ca. 600 BC) by saying "in him we live and move and have our being". Epimenides was not referring to the God of Scripture, but he was right about the fact of our existence being inextricable and inseparable from God. Next, Paul drew from Aratus (310-240 BC) who wrote, in an ode to Zeus, "For we are also his offspring." Although Aratus was wrong about the god he referenced, he was right about the fact that all people exist because of God, and are His offspring by virtue of being made in His image.

Paul was not merely showing off here. He was appealing to his Greek audience at the level of agreed-on truth, truth which they had learned from philosophers who discerned truths about God and our relationship to Him. Even though their teachings overall were false, and their use of God's truth faulty, Paul, in saying, "as also some of your own poets have said," shows us that even the ill winds of false worldviews can carry breezes from the Wind of God.

But so what?

What we want to see from Paul, however, is not merely that it is acceptable to use truth wherever we find it. First, we have to know how to find it, and then we have to understand it for the truth it is, and not for the role it is playing in propping up some ill wind of doctrine.

Paul's use of these two Greek thinkers was entirely enveloped in an exposition of Biblical teaching, an exposition that led ultimately to Christ, risen from the dead, and sitting in judgment over *all* thinkers and worldviews and people. Paul, in a sense, *redeemed* those truths from Epimenides and Aratus and restored them to their proper place within the framework of *God's* truth, by pointing to the God of Scripture, especially as He is known to us through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We want to appreciate the truth of God from every source in which it appears. But to do this we'll have to be, like Paul, steeped in the Word of God and focused on Jesus. Then we can sift the kernels of truth from the chaff of half-truths and outright lies, and bring that truth back to its true Source, by lodging it squarely and rightly within the overall context of the Christian worldview and the Good News about Jesus.

Jesus *is* the truth (Jn. 14.6); and Jesus said that God's Word is truth (Jn. 17.17). The more we are immersed in Jesus and His truth, the less likely we will be to be fooled by a stray truth of God blowing within a shroud of false doctrine. We can acknowledge truth wherever we encounter it; but we can only use the truths that may be present in false worldviews, to the extent that we bring them home to God's Word, whence they ultimately derive, and use them to drive us onward toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ.

For reflection

1. Can you think of an example of Biblical truth shrouded in a false worldview?
2. Why should we want to discern God's truth among false worldviews?
3. How can we use the ubiquitous presence of God's truth to initiate conversations about the Gospel?

Ill Winds

Next steps – Preparation: Have you discovered The Personal Mission Field Workshop? Check it out by [clicking here](#).

6 The Course of God's Wind

*There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,
And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.
The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him,
The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The Spirit of counsel and might,
The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.* Isaiah 11.1, 2

The Wind of God

Let's recall what Jonathan Edwards wrote about the "distinguishing marks" of the Wind of God's Spirit as it blows within and through us. Edwards mentioned five indicators, which together make up the lines on the chart of our journey in life.

When the Spirit of God is filling the sails of our soul, love for Jesus increases; hatred of sin and the devil operates to help us resist temptation and repent of sin; our love for Scripture increases; we become hungry for truth and seek it eagerly; and we strive to grow in love for God and our neighbors, which is the end of all Christian instruction (1 Tim. 1.5).

We can know that we are on course with the Wind of God as we progress daily along these lines. Where we veer from these, or if we have become lax in marking our progress in them, it's possible that some other winds have captured our attention, embrace, and values; and we will be drifting from the Lord's course for our lives.

These are the lines of our course, which we follow toward our ultimate destination in the Lord's Presence. We progress along these lines in smaller increments and specific ways. How can we know that our love for Jesus is increasing? Or that we truly hate sin? Or delight in God's Word, eagerly seek His truth, and have shown love for God and neighbors as the Lord intends?

Isaiah provides us with some constant and continuous indicators that can help us know whether we are sailing in the Wind of God. Let's take a closer look. If Edwards' benchmarks are like plot lines on the chart of our journey, Isaiah's indicators are more the step-by-step, day-to-day markers by which we ensure that we are on course with the Spirit of God.

Seven indicators

Isaiah's take on the Wind of God can help us pay attention to our progress along the lines Edwards described. First, we must always bear in mind that the Wind we sail in is *the Spirit of the LORD*. He is the Spirit Who teaches us God's Law and all His Word (Ezek. 36.26, 27; Jn. 15.25). He brings out the character of God in us, expressed as spiritual fruit (Gal. 5.22, 23), spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12.7-11), and power to witness for Christ (Acts 1.8). Every moment of our lives, in every situation, we seek the Wind of God to express the very character of God, as we keep the sails of our soul unfurled in His constant breezes.

Second, Isaiah mentions that the Wind of God brings *wisdom* to those who sail in Him. Wisdom is skill in living, such that everything we do or say expresses the Presence of Jesus and brings glory to God (Prov. 8; 1 Cor. 10.31). Paul calls us to live as wise people in every moment of our time, for if we do not, strange and evil winds may blow us off course in our journey (Eph. 5.15-17).

The Wind of God also fills the sails of our souls with *understanding*. That is, we see the world, our time, and our lives the way God does, from His vantage point (1 Cor. 2.12, 13). We take every opportunity to make progress in our course; and we are able, by being good listeners, to sympathize with others and aid them in

their journey.

Fourth, the Spirit of God gives us *wise and understanding counsel*, both in keeping on course in life, and in encouraging others and stimulating them to love and good works (Heb. 10.24). Our way of life – every moment, situation, and opportunity – shows that we are in continuous communication with our wonderful Counselor.

The Wind of God is also the *might*, that is, of warlike strength for overcoming enemies and caring for those in need. Every day we find ourselves in a spiritual warfare; we are constantly alert for the devil's wiles and tricks (1 Pet. 5.7, 8). We need the strength of God to resist the devil and to help others whose burdens have become more than they can bear (Gal. 6.1, 2).

The Wind of God leads us into *knowledge*, the knowledge of God and of all things as they are entrusted to us from Jesus, through Him, and unto Him and His glory (Rom. 11.36). We come to see Jesus in everything and everyone, and this daily increasing in the knowledge of the Lord (2 Pet 3.18) bolsters our love for and progress in Him.

Finally, the Wind of God leads us increasingly into the *fear* of the Lord. The moments of our lives are past in reverent awe and wonder, and we are continuously vigilant to stay on course with the Lord, for we know that His discipline for those who stray can be most unpleasant (Heb. 12.3-11).

Number your days

Moses prayed, “So teach *us* to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Ps. 90.12). He had a wilderness before Him, and upwards to a million people following wherever he led. It was an eleven-day journey from Mt. Sinai to the entrance of the promised land at Kadesh Barnea (Deut. 1.2), and Moses needed to make sure that every step they took would be what the Lord intended for them.

Moses had seen the power of God's Wind as He parted the sea to lead His people through to safety (Ex. 14). He had been in the holy storm when the Wind of God wrote the Law with His own finger (Ex. 31.18). And he had been assured that the Lord and His favorable Wind would be with him and the people on their journey (Ex. 33.14). He wanted that Wind to be in his sails every day, every moment, for every situation or need.

He also knew that staying in the Wind of God is a daily, moment-by-moment endeavor, and he prayed that he might have God's wisdom, so that he could live and work for God's glory, every day and all day long (Ps. 90.16, 17).

As we sail the course of increasing love for Jesus, repenting of sin, delighting more and more in God's Word, growing in God's truth, and loving God and our neighbors in everything we do, let us make sure all the sails of our soul are unfurled at all times into the holy and glorious Wind of God, for continuous and increasing fruit, gifts, power, wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and fear of God. As long as we tack in these breezes, we will not be in danger of being blown off course in our journey by the various and sundry ill winds of deception that swirl continuously around us.

For reflection

1. What would you say are the keys to knowing God's Spirit as the driving force in our souls and lives?
2. Moses taught us the importance of prayer for keeping on course with the Lord. How can you better use your own prayer life to this end?
3. What things can keep you from sailing in the Wind of God? How can you overcome these challenges?

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Next steps – Transformation: Pray through Edwards’ benchmarks – the line of your journey with the Lord – and Isaiah’s indicators of the Spirit’s continuous Presence and work in us. Take your time. In which of these areas do you need to pay more attention to the course of your life?

7 Where the Ill Winds Blow

... we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting... Ephesians 4.14

Watch the wind

Good sailors know how to keep watch on the wind. The problem that occurred in Acts 27 was that those in charge of the ship carrying Paul misread the southerly wind that came to them in the harbor at Fair Havens. Their desire was to sail as soon as possible, and they put out into the wind, “supposing that they had obtained *their* desire” (Acts 27.13).

Sailors need to know how to read the winds. Regular winds blow across the major oceans of the planet – trade winds, easterly and westerly winds, and so forth. Good sailors know where they blow, what their relative strength is, and how to make best use of them so they can chart a course and keep to it.

The misreading of that Euraquilon wind in Acts 27 cost the ship and all its cargo, and would have occasioned a great loss of life but for the intervention of God’s grace.

Put your sails into the wrong wind, and you could end up not only way off course, but in serious trouble of becoming shipwrecked in your walk with the Lord. It is very important that we know as much as we can about “every wind of doctrine” that blows across the sails of our soul day by day, so that we can steer continuously into the Wind of God, and slough off all contrary breezes.

The remainder of our study on *Winds of Doctrine* will be a crash course in making sure we know which way the winds blow, so that we can recognize and steer clear of those winds that can be troublesome, and tack more consistently into the wind of God.

The winds of doctrine we need to be aware of blow at us from three primary directions.

Worldly winds

Worldly winds are those prevailing winds of doctrine that blow at us from a wide variety of sources and can be found more or less active anywhere you go on earth. Schools, the media, all kinds of institutions and cultural artifacts, governments, and a good many of our neighbors sail by these winds, and it can be tempting to think that, because so many people have their sails unfurled here, they must be safe for us as well.

As we’ve seen, that can be partly true, but only if the Wind of God is the power that fills our sails. We will consider seven worldly winds that believers must recognize and know how to steer through if we’re going to keep from drifting off the course of our salvation. These are:

- Humanism
- Secularism
- Materialism
- Scientism
- Relativism
- Postmodernism
- Evolutionism

Fleshy winds

Some winds of doctrine, while perhaps not so widespread or consistently active, can be as potent and even *more* potent than worldly winds in challenging our course with the Lord. I think of these as fleshy winds

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because their appeal is more directed to individual persons and their desires and aspirations. Again, we will examine seven of these, to learn how to identify and steer through them:

Narcissism
Solipsism
Hedonism
Presentism
Pragmatism
Racism
Tribalism

Ecclesiastical winds

Finally, strange as it may seem, some of the most potent and deceptive winds of doctrine arise within the community of faith, among believers in Jesus Christ. These can be among the most difficult to identify because, while holding to the terms and some of the key doctrines of faith, they blow us in dangerous directions toward hidden reefs that can shipwreck our faith. We'll consider seven of these as well:

Syncretism
Experientialism
Antinomianism
Doctrinalism
Denominationalism
Functionalism
Traditionalism

Our purpose will be, first, to recognize the characteristics of these various winds of doctrine. What is their source? What direction do they blow? Where, if we give in to them, are they likely to lead us? Second, because, as we have seen, the Wind of God can blow through many sources and channels, we'll try to identify any good or reliable breezes in these various winds of doctrine that may be useful for us in our voyage of faith. Finally, we'll look to the Word of God to help us identify specific ways of tacking against false winds of doctrine and, at the same time, keeping the sails of our soul hoisted into the breezes of God's Spirit.

There are plenty of Euraquilon winds out there, eager to fill and shred the sails of your soul, and to drive your ship of faith onto rocks of disillusionment, disappointment, powerlessness, and despair. We need to know how to keep these winds from creeping into our soul's sails unrecognized, so that we stay joyfully and fruitfully on course with the Lord.

For reflection or discussion

1. Why did Paul say we are "children" if we're always being blown around by "winds of doctrine"?
2. Why is it important that we understand something about these winds and how to resist them?
3. How aware of these "winds of doctrine" are you? In what ways do you experience them?

Next steps – Preparation: Keep a "log" of the various winds of doctrine you encounter for the rest of this study. Try to analyze the messages you're getting, and see whether any of these winds are filling the sails of your soul.

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Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What did Paul mean by “winds of doctrine”? Why do we need to understand these?
2. What is the Wind of God? How can we tell where that Wind is blowing?
3. What are the “sails of the soul” and why is it important that we pay attention to them?
4. What can happen if we fail to pay attention and respond rightly to the various “winds of doctrine” we encounter each day?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this first part of our study, *Winds of Doctrine*?

For prayer:

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Thank you.