

# TRIMMING YOUR SAILS

WINDS OF DOCTRINE 5



A REVISION STUDY FROM  
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

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*Trimming Your Sails*

Trimming Your Sails: Winds of Doctrine 5  
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Welcome to *Trimming Your Sails*

As we have seen, many ill winds of doctrine seek to blow us off course in our journey with the Lord. We need to recognize those ill winds, so that we can adjust our soul – heart, mind, and conscience – to resist false teaching and seek the filling of God’s Spirit.

How can we do that? This is the focus of the final part of our study, “Winds of Doctrine.” We must be vigilant and diligent to keep our soul in the Wind of God’s Spirit. Thus we may know the Lord’s pleasure in our journey with Him, and we will be able to lead others into His pleasure as well.

*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 The Pleasure of the Journey

*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.* Philippians 2.12, 13

### *Pleasurable journey*

We trim the sails of our soul as we monitor and adjust them to make sure only the right Wind is blowing against them. Keeping the ill winds of doctrine from gaining any presence or influence in our soul, and keeping our spiritual canvas unfolded into the Wind of God, is work. Work, according to our reliable friend the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is “activity involving mental or physical effort done in order to achieve a result.” Work is worthwhile, in other words, in direct proportion to the value of the result we seek. Work requires effort. Effort entails preparation, focus, exertion, time-on-task, attention and expertise, progress, and more. It takes effort to do the work of trimming the sails of our soul. If we refuse the effort, because we dislike the idea of work, then we may expect to drift off course in our journey with the Lord, and perhaps even to know His chastening along the way (Heb. 12.3-11).

If seeing Jesus – in glimpses now but ultimately face to face – and being made like Him are not *the* defining results we seek in the life of faith, then we probably won’t work at unpacking and deploying the full measure of our salvation, including the work of keeping the sails of our soul trimmed and filled with the Wind of God. And if the prospect of *seeing* Jesus, of *increasing* in Him, being *filled with His Spirit*, and *journeying* according to His charts and tools, so that we *know Him with us* and *are moved by His power to serve His will* – if that prospect does not function as the supreme and driving force of every aspect of our lives, then we’re not going to devote much *effort* toward the *work* of our salvation; and we’ll be largely indifferent to the *work* of keeping the sails of our soul trimmed and full of God’s Spirit.

It comes down to what *pleases* us, what *result* we’re seeking. Please note that, in Philippians 2.13, the word “*His*” does not appear in the original Greek text. Its being set in italics informs us of as much. The text actually (literally) reads: “...for God is the One working in you both to will and to work for that which pleases.” Not just that which pleases *God*, but true and lasting and complete and altogether satisfying and holy *pleasure*, pleasure that *we* may know every day and all along our journey with the Lord. David taught that such pleasure is only found *in the Presence of the Lord Himself* (Ps. 16.11). When we know the Presence of the Lord, we know that which pleases. Which *really* pleases, *pleases entirely*, and pleases purely and unfailingly and with joy unspeakable.

That which truly pleases is knowing the Lord in each moment of our journey. God is the One Who is working within us that we might *will* that which pleases, and that we might *engage the work of attaining and possessing* that which pleases.

If you want that, you’ll take up the call of working out your salvation in fear and trembling every day. And no small part of that work, which leads to the unspeakable pleasure of the Presence of the Lord, involves keeping the sails of your soul trimmed.

### *The sails of the soul (reprise)*

In this series we have been considering our lives in Christ as spiritual vessels sailing on a journey toward the Lord. In this journey, the state of our soul is of paramount importance. The world knows this. The devil knows this, too. And these conspire to blow against the sails of our soul with ill winds of various sorts, to keep us from that which truly pleases, knowing the Lord consistently and increasingly.

What captures our mind, enralls our heart, and settles into our conscience will determine the course of our

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life. What and how we think, what and how much we love, and what we value – mind, heart, and conscience – are the masts of the soul which hold the spiritual canvas intended for the filling of God’s Spirit. That canvas – those varied sails – are desire, delight, and love (on the mast of the heart); reception, attention, and interest (on the mast of the mind); and assimilation, value, and priority (on the mast of the conscience). The adjustments we make to these sails will determine which winds we allow into them and which direction our journey of faith will take.

In this final part of our study, we will examine the *work* which we must do continually to keep our soul’s sails trimmed and adjusted, so that only the Wind of God’s Spirit fills and drives them. I want to quote again a paragraph from early in our study: “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 on Jesus Christ, teaches us to hate sin and love God’s Word, and brings forth the fruit of love in us.”

#### *Get ready to work*

Or, as Paul put it: “work out your salvation in fear and trembling.” And while working out our salvation involves not only keeping our soul ship-shape, this great work begins there, and must be constantly attended to if we are to make progress in our journey.

In any sailing vessel a good bit of work is always ongoing. There are decks to swab, meals to fix, bilges to pump, and whatnot. But all those ancillary tasks will not enable a pleasurable journey, and they will not allow us to reach our final destination unless the sails of our vessel are adjusted and trimmed to catch the Wind that alone can drive us home.

And it is to this great work, this ongoing and pleasurable effort, that we turn in this final installment in our study, “Winds of Doctrine.”

#### *For reflection*

1. What kinds of “work” go into working out our salvation in fear and trembling?
2. Jesus is the end we seek, the ultimate pleasure any of us can ever know. How do you experience the pleasure of knowing Jesus?
3. What do you presently do to keep the sails of your soul trimmed and adjusted into the Wind of God?

*Next steps – Preparation: Review the previous four installments in this series. Where do you expect to have to work the hardest to realize the pleasurable journey the Lord intends for you?*

## 2 Trimming the Sails of Your Heart

*“The heart is deceitful above all things,  
And desperately wicked;  
Who can know it?  
I, the LORD, search the heart,  
I test the mind,  
Even to give every man according to his ways,  
According to the fruit of his doings. Jeremiah 17.9, 10*

*You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections. 2 Corinthians 6.12*

### *The heart of the matter*

Everything in human life begins in the heart. I don't mean the physical heart, which pumps blood throughout our bodies. Rather, I mean the heart as it is spoken of in Scripture, the immaterial and spiritual, affective aspect of the soul. While there is a good bit of functional overlap in the components of the soul – as there is also in the divine Trinity – yet three distinct aspects are mentioned in Scripture. These are the heart, the mind, and the conscience; and we are considering these as “masts” in our spiritual vessel, from which all manner of “spiritual canvas” drapes to catch the Wind of God.

We cannot speak of the heart in “scientific” terms, as though it were a material entity which could be observed, manipulated, studied, and controlled by physical means. But that does not mean we cannot speak of it truthfully and really. The heart is spiritual in essence, and it is the foundational aspect of the soul and, thus, of all of life. The heart is the heart of the matter where our lives and journey with the Lord are concerned. Thus, Solomon advises us to “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Prov. 4.23). The sails of the heart capture the holy affections which the Spirit blows into our soul. Those affections steer and shape everything else in our life. We need to keep a close watch on our heart, to make sure that only the *right* affections are operating there.

That was the problem Paul had to deal with in Corinth. The churches in Corinth were plagued with all kinds of problems – immorality, schism, spiritual smugness, immaturity, vengefulness, and more. They were not experiencing full and abundant life, as Jesus promised; rather, they were slipping back into carnal and fleshly ways, and losing their identity as the Body of Christ. What was holding them back? What was restricting them from making progress in their walk with the Lord?

Their own misguided affections. They had allowed ill winds of self-interest, tribalism, doctrinalism, and more to settle in the sails of their souls. They sought glory for themselves rather than for God alone. To get back on course, they would need to recover those true affections which God sends to shape and direct us, chief among these being love (1 Cor. 13).

### *Watch what you love*

We have said that the heart unfurls three primary sails to catch the Wind of God – desire, delight, and love. Many other affections can also be found on the mast of the heart, including fear, compassion, kindness, anger (righteous), and more. But these three – desire, delight, and love – are the primary sails. If we can keep ill winds of false doctrine from filling them, the other affections will function as God intends.

We must with all diligence keep a close watch on what we desire, what gives us delight, and what we love. The Wind of God – His Holy Spirit – intends that we should desire above all else that God be glorified in everything we do (1 Cor. 10.31; 1 Thess. 2.12). When God is glorified, His Presence becomes known, a glimpse of His beauty is realized, His wisdom comes to light, the fruit of the Spirit flourishes, evil and

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wickedness are banished, and Jesus presents Himself to the world, even in our smallest deeds or softest words.

We learn to desire the glory of God by concentrating on it, until we love the glory of God above all things, and thus desire to know and express it as often as we can. We see the glory of God in all His Word, of course. But we can also see the glory of God throughout creation (Ps. 19.1-14). In both God's Word and His world, we may glimpse the majesty, greatness, grandeur, power, wisdom, and care of God, and know His Presence weighing against us fearfully yet joyfully. And especially when His Word and world enlarge our vision of Jesus, then we see more clearly, in human terms, what forms the glory of God takes.

The more we gaze to see the glory of God in these ways, the more desirable it will become to us. The more we desire God's glory – especially as it presents in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4.6) – the more we will seek and know it. The more we know God's glory, experiencing His Presence, the more we will *delight* in it. And the more we delight in it, the more again we will seek it, until desiring and seeking and delighting in the glory of God combine to set love for God and His glory as the defining affection in our heart.

But we must watch over our hearts with all diligence, making sure that lesser and perhaps even sinful desires are not finding a home there (Ps. 139.23, 24).

#### *Love what is best*

Since we know that the glory of God is the supreme good which brings fullness, righteousness, peace, joy, and grace into our soul, loving the glory of God must be our supreme desire.

But we'll have to *work* at this, first, by understanding the glory of God and learning to experience His glory in Scripture and creation. This is the work of reading, meditation, conversation, prayer, waiting on the Lord, and increasing in the likeness of Jesus Christ. We'll need to take constant inventory of all the other "loves" that compete for a place in our heart. Some of these, of course, will be legitimate, as for example, love for your spouse and children. But even Jesus taught us that love for these must not supersede love for God and His glory. We must put all our loves in proper perspective, asking, in effect, "How can I love this person so that the glory of God is evident in how I feel, what I say, and how I act?" We must *look through* those we love until we can see the glory of God coming to expression in our love for them; then we may act in confidence that God will be glorified by what we do or say.

But we can become deceived in our hearts, given that remnants of sin yet reside here. So if we cannot see God's glory coming through in anything we might desire or delight in, then it may be that these are interloping winds of doctrine, ill winds which, should we continue to desire and delight in them, may cause our affections to go awry, thus diverting us from our course in Jesus and restricting us from His best for our lives.

What do you love? Do you know? Do you delight in things God delights in, so that you desire them increasingly? You will keep the sails of your soul well-trimmed as you watch over your heart and train it to desire, delight in, and love God and His glory above all else.

#### *For reflection*

1. God has made us to seek, know, and manifest His glory. Why?
2. How can prayer, planning, and preparation help us to trim the sails of our heart?
3. How can you know when your affections, rather than serving you for God's glory, are restricting you from full and abundant life in Jesus? What should you do then?



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*Next steps – Preparation: Meditate on Psalm 139.23, 24. Wait on the Lord in silence as you follow the counsel of these verses. Set your heart to desire, delight in, and love the glory of God for everything you will do this day.*

### 3 Trimming the Sails of Your Mind

*If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.* Colossians 3.1, 2

#### *Mindset*

You have to give evolutionary thinkers this much: They are unfailingly consistent.

Evolutionists are committed to a framework of thought that is determined to explain everything without reference to God. According to evolutionary thinking, all things and processes throughout the creation are determined by chance and natural selection. Read a book by any evolutionist. You'll be impressed by how much they know about their subject, how thoroughly immersed they are in the literature of their discipline, and how they can overlook or simply ignore the most glaring inconsistencies in their point of view.

Expect to be a bit flustered though by the fact that they just can't see beyond their materialistic blinders, and they always end up at the same place from which they started: Evolution explains everything. You and I can look at the same phenomena evolutionists study and see the hand of God everywhere. But not them. No sir. They have *made up their minds* that evolution is the explanation and driving force of everything that exists, and they will not be dissuaded by our reasons or arguments.

And this is why Paul commands us to set *our* minds on Christ, exalted in glory, ruling at the Father's right hand, commanding angels and restraining demons, putting His enemies under His feet, upholding the cosmos by His powerful Word, preparing a place for us of eternal glory and bliss, restoring the reconciled world, and making ready to return and take us to Himself. Set your mind *there*, because this is ultimate truth. Set your mind *there*, and let the beauty and majesty and wonder of it enthrall and enfold you. Set your mind *there* and see Jesus, seeing you, as you do everything for His glory. Set your mind *there* and know the peace that passes understanding and the joy that nothing can take from you – the peace and joy that issue from the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4.6, 16-18).

When the reality of Jesus Christ, exalted in glory, becomes your *mindset*, then you'll be able to keep the sails of your mind adjusted to the steady Wind of God (Ps. 16.8, 11).

#### *Watch what you're thinking*

But how do we do this? Obviously, we need to be careful about the thoughts that we allow to come into our mind. Lots of ill winds blow against us day by day. They come from all kinds of sources, and most of them encourage us to think of ourselves as somehow the center of the world: "It's all about you." "It won't hurt to think this way; you'll like it." "It's only a wee bit of self-indulgence." Such spirits, as they engage the sails of your mind, can soon distract you from seeing Jesus and seeing and thinking with His mind (1 Cor. 2.16), to seeing only whatever you want at any moment, and thinking only about yourself.

We need to test all such thoughts, ideas, opinions, and worldviews against the reality of Jesus Christ, exalted in glory and unfolding His plan for the divine economy (1 Jn. 4.1-4). We must not allow our thinking to become conformed to the false notions, trivial beliefs, half-truths, and outright lies of the unbelieving age that blows and storms around us (Rom. 12.1, 2). Like Timothy, we must keep a close watch on whatever doctrine we may be pondering, or that may be influencing our choices and decisions (1 Tim 4.16); and we must put off all old ways of thinking and hoist onto the mast of our mind the sails of reception, attention, and interest, adjusted to receive only the Wind of God.

To think with the mind of Christ we must *receive* His Word daily by reading, study, and meditation. We must *pay attention* to how Christ sees the world, and what Jesus thinks about this or that. His love and His

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commitment to truth must guide our view of the world and our place in it. The more we develop *interest* in Christ and His Word, the more we will know the Wind of God directing our thoughts, just as we know Him filling our hearts with holy desire, delight, and love.

Prayer is a good place to watch what you're thinking – prayer in the morning, before every activity, throughout the day, and before you retire at night. Prayer with other Christian friends. Prayer in which you only listen for the Word of Jesus. Prayers of confession when you stumble. Prayers of praise as you meditate on the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Prayers of wonder and song as you contemplate the greatness of our exalted Savior and King.

#### *Think what is best*

Every day and in every situation, our goal must be to take every thought captive and make it obedient to Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 10.3-5). Stray thoughts, vain ideas, fleeting sinful notions, doubts about the truth of God's Word, or ubiquitous but lying worldviews will come at us all day long. It has been the burden of this study to help us learn to recognize these worldly, fleshly, and ecclesiastical ill winds that can blow you off course in your journey with the Lord.

Recognizing ill winds is essential if we are to test the spirits and keep a close watch on the doctrine that drives us forward in life. But we must make sure that Christ is the beginning, substance, and end of all our thinking (Rom. 11.36), so that our mind is continually open for examination and transformation before Him. We can understand and recognize the ill winds of doctrine that would divert us from Christ; but we do not have to yield to them. We take them captive when, in the Name of Jesus, we banish them as components of our own thought life, reject them as factors in decision-making, and replace their vain suggestions with the truth that saves and sanctifies us (Jn. 17.17).

Keep your eyes on Jesus, and become daily more immersed in His Word, and you'll learn to think what is true and best about everything in your life. Taking every thought captive for Jesus will be just what you do as you think about this or that, analyze a situation, make your plans, formulate ideas, or share your opinions with others. The Wind of God is the Wind of truth; let your sails be filled with Him, so that you sing and praise and give thanks to God in all things, and you will be ready to banish any ill winds of doctrine that seek to divert your mind from the truth that is in Christ Jesus.

#### *For reflection*

1. How would you explain to a new believer what it means to set your mind on Christ?
2. What does it mean to "test" the spirits and ill winds of doctrine that blow against us each day?
3. How can you anticipate ill winds of doctrine and prepare for them, so that you keep the sails of your mind constantly trimmed to receive, attend to, and take interest in the Wind of God?

*Next steps – Preparation: In prayer, try to anticipate the ill winds of doctrine you'll have to deal with today. Trim the sails of your mind to be ready for them by focusing on Jesus and abiding in His Word.*

## 4 Trimming the Sails of Your Conscience

... for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)... Romans 2.14, 15

*This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck...* 1 Timothy 1.18, 19

### *The set of the saw*

I am not a carpenter, but I know this much about using a circular saw: If your saw is set at an angle other than 90 degrees, you will not be able to make a straight cut. The angle at which you set your saw will determine the angle of the cut you make on any board. If you want a cut, say, at 45 degrees, to fit two pieces of baseboard together in a corner, then set your saw accordingly.

But if you leave your saw set at that angle, no matter how many times you try to cut a true right angle in a board, you will not succeed. You'll need to adjust the angle of your saw back to 90 degrees if you want a straight, right-angle cut.

The conscience is to the soul as the set-of-the-saw is to a circular saw. However it is set, at whatever angle in relation to truth, will determine how you live.

In the soul, the conscience is the seat of judgment, as Paul explained in Romans 2. The conscience filters, assesses, and either approves or disapproves what the heart is feeling and the mind is thinking; and it engages the will to put those feelings, thoughts, and values into action. If your conscience is set on that which is *good*, you'll be more likely to speak good words and do good works.

But if the “set” of your conscience is skewed, so that your values, priorities, and default judgments are not true to Scripture, then you're going to have a hard time journeying with the Wind of God in your sails. You won't recognize the ill winds that are influencing your decisions and actions; nor will you perceive that you have begun to drift from the course of our great salvation (Heb. 2.1-3).

The Greek word for conscience is *συνείδησις* – *suneidesis*. “Sun” means “with” and “eidesis” suggest things firmly known. The conscience collects things firmly and truly known and brings them together into a template for judging the deliberations of the soul. And as our second text suggests, it is very important that we make sure to have a *good* conscience; otherwise, we might come to shipwreck in our journey of faith.

### *Know what you value*

A good conscience has to be built-up within us, for we do not come by it naturally. Naturally, the conscience is riddled with sinful self-interest. What it *values*, the *priorities* it follows, and the *default choices* it pursues are all by nature aimed at aggrandizing our own wellbeing. A sinful conscience shows the effects of many winds of doctrine, blowing haphazardly but continuously into the sails of the conscience – assimilation, value, and priority. A sinful conscience *assimilates* or allows to harbor whatever ideas, notions, or plans of action reinforce the self as of most importance. It places ultimate *value* on all such ill winds, so that the *priority* of our will and actions becomes to do what's best for us.

The Holy Spirit works through a *good* conscience to guide us in the right and to prick us when we sin; if we fail to build-up a good conscience we quench the Wind of the Spirit.

### *Trimming Your Sails*

It is important, therefore, that we take a hard look at our conscience – what we value as of most importance in life. Consider how you use your time, for instance. Does the way you spend your time indicate a high value and priority of loving God and others? Or is your time primarily devoted to whatever you want for you? Look at your expenditures: What does the way you use your money tell you about what you value most? What priorities guide your spending? What default choices dominate the use you make of your wealth?

Do you talk more than listen? Do you talk mainly about yourself, your interests and activities, what makes you happy? Look at how you use your social media: Is it just one long saga of details about you?

What values are residing in your conscience? Whatever they are, they will guide your affections and determine your thinking, so that your words and deeds will speak to the world about who you are in your soul.

When you pray, what tends to be the focus of your prayers? God and His glory? The progress of His Kingdom? Revival, renewal, and awakening? The needs of others? Or your own self-centered wants?

When ill winds of doctrine are filling the sails of our conscience, we cannot sail a straight course with God. We may earnestly desire to do so. We may even insist that we're trying our best. But until those sails are *set* to receive the Wind of God, and to deny access to the various ill winds that come against us each day, you are on a course of spiritual misdirection and possible shipwreck.

#### *Value what is best*

Paul insists that we should desire a *good* conscience. But a good conscience must be built, with all its relevant sails – assimilation, value, and priority – adjusted to the Wind of God's Word and Spirit.

The place to begin is by looking to Jesus – reading about Him, meditating on Him, putting together a vision of Jesus, exalted in glory and reigning at the Father's right hand. For Jesus is *good*. Indeed, He alone is good among all people who ever lived. He is the good Shepherd. His words and teachings are good. His example of self-denying and sacrificial service is good.

And the path He has marked out for us to walk is good as well – the path of God's Law (1 Jn. 2.1-6).

Paul reminds us that the Law of God, far from being obsolete or burdensome, is holy and righteous and *good*. As an exercise, read Psalm 119 in one sitting. As you do, make a list of the verbs the psalmist uses to describe his relationship to or desire with respect to the Law of God: keep, walk in, take heed, hidden in the heart, rejoiced over, and many, many more. Once you have a complete list, go back and pray through each of those words, asking God to make that your attitude toward His holy and righteous and good Law.

And if you find that these words do *not* describe your attitude to the Law of God, then take each one to the Lord in prayer, seeking a strategy to have that word become more true as a statement of what you value, what your priorities ought to be, and of the default choices you long to make.

A good conscience doesn't simply happen. Work hard to assimilate the vision of Jesus and a growing understanding of His Law. Prayerfully commit yourself, day by day, to valuing that vision and those statutes as the defining set of your soul. Then make your plans and set your priorities accordingly, until you build-up a good conscience in your soul, one that rejoices to be filled with the Spirit of God and led by His Word for the glory of Jesus and His Kingdom in all you do.

#### *For reflection*

1. How can you know when your conscience is focused on anything other than what is good?
2. How would you counsel a new believer to begin building-up a good conscience?

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3. Are you working as hard as you should to build-up and maintain a good conscience? Explain.

*Next steps – Transformation: Today, take steps to work more consistently at building-up a good conscience. What steps will you take?*

## 5 Marks of the Journey: The Vision of Christ

*But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.* Hebrews 2.9

*Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.* 1 John 3.2, 3

### *The destination always in view*

On the wall in my study hangs a world map that dates from early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a gift to Susie and me from a friend. A series of marks traces a somewhat jagged but determined line from Australia under the tip of South America to England, recording the voyage of the ship *Golden City*, somewhere around 1830, from Sydney to London. They were entered by a passenger day by day to mark the progress of his journey home, perhaps to his beloved.

We can imagine how difficult that journey must have been – the daily drudgery of life at sea, the poor quality of food, the need to keep oneself busy, the lack of privacy, and the dangers of being on the ocean in a wooden vessel. It is obvious that the ship's captain and navigator understood how to make best use of the winds, since the *Golden City* made steady progress over many days. But at times, the ship appears to have sailed into contrary winds, especially about half-way through, when a sudden change of direction required a two-day course correction.

How that gentleman must have delighted to mark the ship's progress day by day. Each day the anticipation of seeing his beloved and being reunited with her would have increased. When he took the time to envision her face and to meditate on the delight of her presence, the difficulties of the journey would have become more bearable. The more those marks accumulated on the map, and the more of that line he filled in, the more his desire for home and beloved must have increased as well.

This man's record of his journey offers practical advice for us in our journey with the Lord. If we keep the sails of our soul adjusted to gather the Wind of God, we may expect to make the kind of progress in faith that Jonathan Edwards explained in his sermon, *Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*: growing esteem for Jesus and confidence in the Gospel; daily victories over temptations and the lies of the devil; increased love for God's Word, combined with a growing hunger for and delight in His truth; and love for God and our neighbors more consistently expressed in all our words and deeds.

It will help us in our journey of faith, and in keeping the sails of our soul trimmed for the Wind of God, to settle on some markers of our own, to record our journey and to show us, day by day, that we are on course with the Lord and making real progress in our calling to His Kingdom and glory (1 Thess. 2.12).

The first of those marks is a growing vision of our Beloved and our homeland.

### *The vision of Christ*

Both the writer of Hebrews and the apostle John encourage us to "see Jesus" and to look forward with increasing anticipation of seeing Him "as He is", radiant with glory, robed in majesty, brilliant in light and strength, transforming us day by day into that same likeness (2 Cor. 3.12-18). Paul wrote that the hardships he had to bear in his own journey with the Lord were not to be compared with the vision of unseen things he kept before him, and the weight of glory he anticipated knowing when his journey was through (2 Cor. 4.6, 16-18).

### *Trimming Your Sails*

How clear is your vision of Christ, exalted in glory? Do you see His flame-lit eyes? The glory that radiates from His face? Does He extend to you His scepter of uprightness, inviting you to come closer and become more like Him? Do His splendor, majesty, power, and strength take your breath away? Can you see yourself, seated with Him at the right hand of God, seeing all the vast cosmos and all the nations of the world in a single ray of sun? Do you hear the continuous, joyous singing of saints and angels? The praise and applause of uncountable departed saints? The continuous and sub-aural drone of His never-ceasing Word, as it holds the entire universe together and keeps it going?

And do you see Jesus, in this infinitely glorious landscape, in every page and passage of the Scriptures, looking out on you and beckoning you into His Presence of light, warmth, peace, and joy?

I doubt our traveling gentleman would have had an actual photo or painting of his wife. All he had were his memory and his imagination. That was enough to lead him to mark the days of his passage with growing anticipation and joy.

But we have more. We have the Word of God. We have the works of Christ throughout the creation. We have fellow-travelers who also are looking to Jesus, striving toward Jesus, longing for the day when we will see Him face-to-face. We can be sure that the Wind of God's Spirit blows to fill our memories and imaginations with the glorious vision of Christ, revealed continuously all around us. To the extent that we keep this vision before us, and nourish and enlarge it day by day, we can mark progress in our journey toward our Beloved.

#### *The vision of our homeland*

As much as our gentleman traveler longed to be in his wife's presence, so he also looked forward to seeing his homeland. Australia was not his home. The decks and cabins of the *Golden City* were not his home. His home was London, the greatest city in the world in its day, a city of culture, friends, beauty, order, and delight, which he was eager to enjoy.

This world is not our home. We are travelers and pilgrims to an ultimate destination where all will be glorious and upright and holy and good. Lions will lie down with lambs. Children will delight to play with serpents. Music and art and gardens and good things of every sort will be available to us, without any of the blight or stains or ugliness that mark our day. And the King, our Beloved, will give light to every place, so that there are no more shadows, fears, sorrows, or tears. Do we see that glorious Kingdom in all its fullness? Do we long for it earnestly? Seek it daily? Proclaim its present and coming greatness, and the King Who rules over it, to all the people in our lives?

We expect to make daily progress in and toward the City of our God, and we can mark that progress in our lives by the evidence of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit that issues from our soul in all our words and deeds (Rom. 14:17, 18). The Spirit of God blows against our souls to bring the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven; we can know that we are tacking on His course as the power of the Kingdom becomes more visible in us day by day (1 Cor. 4:20).

I encourage you to begin marking your journey with the Lord today – in prayer, times of meditation, in a journal or diary, by sharing with friends, through singing, and by quiet and persistent envisioning of our King and the City to Come.

#### *For reflection*

1. What are you presently doing to measure your progress in your walk with and work for the Lord?
2. What can you do to make the vision of Christ and the eternal City more constant in the sails of your soul?



*Trimming Your Sails*

3. How can you help your fellow believers to be more diligent in setting the Lord always before them (Ps. 16.8)?

*Next steps – Preparation: What can you begin doing today, and every day, to fix your heart, mind, and conscience more on Christ and His Kingdom?*

## 6 Marks of the Journey: Conversations about Christ

*Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.* Acts 8.4

*Come and hear, all you who fear God,  
And I will declare what He has done for my soul.* Psalm 66.16

### *Gossiping the Gospel*

I can imagine that it would not have been very long into the voyage of the *Golden City* from Sydney to London that other passengers would have become aware that one of their number was tracing their journey on a daily basis.

They would have asked to see the map, of course. What traveler, like some child in a back seat, doesn't want to know, "Are we almost there?" With our gentleman passenger's help, his fellow sojourners could have kept up to date on their progress toward home. I can even believe it must have been a daily ritual to gather around the map, note the progress, get to know one another, and share their common experience, hopes, and aspirations.

Those gatherings must have sparked some interesting and exciting conversations, as the passengers talked about London and what they loved about it and looked forward to upon arrival. We can imagine many conversations that as the passengers expressed their visions of the journey's end, brought excitement and encouragement to one another, and made their "here and now" life at sea rather more bearable, as together they kept their "then and there" in view. Their vision of home and loved ones would have grown clearer and stronger with each passing day, and I can imagine they were eager to talk about it, and to reinforce one another in their hope.

Michael Green wonderfully translates the phrase "preaching the word" in Acts 8.4 as "gossiping the Gospel" (*Evangelism and the Early Church*). You know how a gossip is. He cherishes every juicy tidbit of information that comes his way, and seizes every opportunity to pass it along to others. A literal translation of Acts 8.4 goes something like, "Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere 'good newsing' the Word." The Good News, of course, is Jesus, and the Kingdom He has given to us His saints, both in its present form and in the form as it is to come fully when He returns.

The good news for those *Golden City* passengers was that each day brought them a little closer to London. And I can't help but think that their conversations echoed their growing anticipation of being home sooner with each passing day.

The same prospect should excite us to talk about our Beloved and our homeland; and such conversations can serve as a second benchmark of progress in our journey with the Lord. As the sails of our soul continue to be filled with the Wind of God's Spirit, we will be emboldened to "gossip the Gospel" as often as possible (Acts. 1.8).

### *Evangelizing one another*

Who are the fellow voyagers in your life? Those who know the Lord, who know they'll see Him face to face one day, and who look forward to that glorious City to Come? Here is the place to begin gossiping the Gospel, with and among those who already know the Lord, and with whom we are on a journey together unto His Kingdom and glory.

Opportunities abound to encourage our fellow travelers with the Good News of Jesus and His Kingdom. As we grow in our vision of Christ and our homeland, meditating on it faithfully, and setting it always before us,

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our excitement and joyous anticipation will grow. We should never want for some word of encouragement, or sharing, or prayer to help our fellow sojourners bear up under the struggles and challenges of our “here and now”, so that, increasingly, we know our “then and there” as a daily reality.

Don’t waste precious opportunities to “Good News” your fellow believers! Go out of your way to do so, by text, or email, or by sending a card or making a phone call. The best way to stimulate one another to love and good works – the final benchmark of our journey to the Lord (Heb. 10.24) – is through sharing, singing, praying, and chatting away gladly together about our beautiful Savior, Who is Lord of all nations, King of glory, Prince of peace, Upholder of the vast cosmos, and the One Who is making all things new.

You’ll know the sails of your soul are filled with the Wind of God, and that you are making real progress in your journey, when gossiping the Gospel with your Christian friends is something you look forward to and make the most of at every opportunity (Eph. 5.15-17; 1 Thess. 5.11).

#### *Evangelizing everywhere*

Not only with our Christian friends, but everywhere our journey takes us, let us, having set the vision of Christ and our homeland firmly in our soul, be always ready to give a reason for the hope that is within us, to tell with joy about Jesus and His love, and to offer the Good News of forgiveness and life to whosoever may come.

We have become a generation of non-evangelistic evangelicals. We are known by the world as “evangelicals” not because we gossip the Good News of Jesus freely and joyfully, but because, while we claim to believe in Jesus and His Word, we demonstrate a kind of spiritual smugness, spilling over into hypocrisy, that those who are on the outside looking in associate with that epithet. In the world’s eyes, “evangelicals” are not those who are excited about Jesus; they are those who are angry and judgmental and intolerant and out-of-step with the times, and therefore, undeserving of any serious attention.

Let us recover our vision of Christ and the homeland; let us reinforce one another in this vision, and encourage one another day after day in the hope of glory; and let us take up our calling as witnesses to Christ, lights to the world, agents of grace and salvation, and proclaimers of Good News to a world that desperately needs to hear it.

As we do, we will know that the Spirit is filling us, and that we are on the same course as those believers in Acts 8 who went everywhere gossiping the Good News of Jesus.

#### *For reflection*

1. Suppose someone ask you: “What is the Gospel?” What would you say?
2. What can you do to be more consistent in evangelizing your Christian friends?
3. How can you prepare for opportunities to share the Good News with any unbelievers God might send you to during the day?

*Next steps – Preparation: Daily evangelize yourself by praying the Gospel back to the Lord. Ask God each day to give you someone with whom you can gossip the Good News of Jesus.*

## 7 Marks of the Journey: The Ongoing Work of Christ

*But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.* Hebrews 6.9, 10

### *A long journey*

The journey from Sydney to London aboard the *Golden City*, somewhere in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, would have taken several months. We can see that by the many marks indicating daily progress on our map. Facing such a prospect – being on board a ship at sea with a company of fellow-travelers and a crew of hardened sailors – one has some decisions to make: How will I associate with these people during the months ahead? Will I ignore them and keep to myself? Will I be available to lend a hand as needed? Will I take an interest in my fellow passengers? Try to cheer or engage them? Will I try to make this passage a pleasant journey for them and for myself?

Perhaps our gentleman passenger pondered such questions; and as he thought about his beloved, waiting for him, he may have considered what he might like his fellow passengers to say to his beloved about him, and the kind of company he had been throughout their long journey. It seems to me not unlikely that, as his fellow passengers besought him each day concerning their progress, he may have decided to share his map with them, to converse gladly, and to do whatever else he could to lighten their load, bear their burdens, and keep them pointed toward home and loved ones.

Life is a long journey, but we who make this passage with the Wind of God in our sails know the destination, and we see our Beloved and our eternal homeland more clearly each day. We mark our progress in this journey of life by the increasing clarity of our vision of Christ and His Kingdom, and by the eagerness with which, as each day brings us closer to our destination, we share our hopes with others and encourage them to see and love Jesus as we do. Throughout our journey we will encounter many fellow-travelers; we desire that they might see the hope that is in us as we look confidently toward the end of our voyage, and we want to be ready to talk with them about that hope, as often as we can (1 Pet. 3.15).

It is natural to think – since we know this is how the Captain of our salvation lived – that we might also want to lighten the load of those who journey with us, bear their burdens, and soften the stress and strain of their journey by doing whatever good we can. We who are increasing in the vision of Christ and His Kingdom, and who “gossip the Good News” to friends and strangers alike, can also chart the progress of our journey in the Lord by the good works that “accompany salvation” which we do every day.

Doing good, and bringing the pleasure of knowing Jesus into our daily journey, requires forethought, diligence, faith, and love for our neighbors.

### *The pleasure of your company?*

Talking about Jesus and urging others to consider Him as their own destination in life is fortified by good works. Good works shine through those who know Jesus, showing the glory of God and calling others to consider Him in even the smallest everyday good works we might do (Matt. 5.13-16; 1 Cor. 10.31). Jesus was renowned in His day for doing good works (Acts 10.38). The good works that Jesus began to do, His followers continued to do throughout the book of Acts and the New Testament (Acts 1.1). Doing good is the *fruit* of salvation, not the *means* to it. Good works “accompany salvation” and demonstrate the veracity of our words.

We who know Jesus experience the good works of the Lord every day, because, as we understand, “the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD” (Ps. 33.5). We see His goodness everywhere – in the daily blessings of

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life, breath, food, friends, and work – as well as in the beauty, order, wonder, and majesty of creation. The Lord does good to us, and brings us many benefits, which we acknowledge in prayer and by desiring more of His goodness and salvation (Ps. 116.12-14).

The good works of the Lord Jesus are tokens of His Presence with us, and in His Presence is fullness of joy and holy pleasure (Ps. 16.11). By the good works Jesus does for us, our voyage is made pleasant – not always *easy*, and not without *trials* and *setbacks* and having to fight off many ill winds of doctrine. But pleasant nonetheless, and bringing us continuously and ever more deeply into the *shalom* of our Lord Jesus Christ.

By doing good works we bring the pleasure we know in Jesus into the lives of others. That's not to say they will always appreciate or welcome our good works. Indeed, the good works Jesus did put Him on the cross; and as it is given to us to believe in Him, so too it is given to us to suffer with Him (Phil. 1.29).

Nevertheless, the Golden Rule must guide us throughout our journey. We'll know the Wind of God is filling the sails of our soul as doing good to others – bringing to them the holy pleasure we want for ourselves – becomes a more consistent characteristic of us in our journey.

#### *Remember God remembering you*

We will not need our fellow-travelers to report to Jesus about the good works we do to them. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that the Lord Himself sees our good works; He does not forget them. Rather, He sees Himself reflected in our good works. He knows that only His Spirit can fill and direct us for such goodness (Gal. 5.22, 23), and He delights to bring us into His pleasure as we seek opportunities for doing good to others.

The various ill winds that assail our soul will try to deflect us from thinking about such things as self-denial, sacrificial service, and neighbor love. They will – ever so gently – suggest that we must look out for ourselves and be concerned above all else for our own interests and wellbeing.

But the Wind of God does not seek to conduct us thusly. And we can be sure that the sails of our mind, heart, and conscience are billowing with the Spirit of God as doing good and showing neighbor love become increasingly how we spend our time in this journey of faith.

Our God sees and remembers every good work we do for others. Remember this, and increase in good works as we draw ever-nearer to our home port and final destination.

#### *For reflection or discussion*

1. We're not saved by good works, but we're not saved without them. Explain.
2. Why are good works a true measure of progress in the life of faith?
3. What can you do to prepare for each day, so that you make the most of every opportunity for doing good to others?

*Next steps – Preparation: In prayer, chart your course through the journey for the coming day. Ask God to show you where you might bring His pleasure to others through good works of love.*

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*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. How does the Lord intend our journey in Him to be one of pleasure?
2. What do we mean by “trimming the sails of your soul?”
3. To what can we look as marks of progress in your journey with the Lord?
4. What can you do to remain constantly vigilant against any ill winds of doctrine?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this fifth part of our study, “Winds of Doctrine”?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 360 Zephyr Road, Williston, VT 05495.

Thank you.