

# Navigating the *Winds* of Culture

by David Langford



THE CHRISTIAN  
**Appeal**

## Preface



John Gulley

**W**ind is a surprisingly strong element of nature. Gentle breezes can comfort us and lull us to sleep. But gale-force winds can dash mighty ships against rocks and wreak havoc. The trick is to harness the force of the wind, to know when to let it fill our sails and when to tack against it. In this issue, Consulting Editor David Langford encourages God's people to be wise sailors, to adopt the attitude of Christ, and to allow the wind of the Spirit to fill our sails as we "Navigate the Winds of Culture."

By David Langford

The winds of culture are always blowing, but they don't always blow in the direction we need to go.



John Gulley

"Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God."

Romans 12  
The Message

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CHRISTIAN APPEAL

Navigating the Winds of Culture





## Navigating the *Winds* of Culture

Not long ago, I was driving on Interstate 20 on a particularly windy day. Somewhere between Abilene and Dallas, I saw an 18-wheeler on the side of the road. Apparently, the wind had blown it over. As I drove by and witnessed the scene, several thoughts came to mind about our Christian walk.

I thought of Jesus' admonition to make sure our treasures are in heaven, not on earth. Large trucks carry great treasure and are more easily blown over by a crosswind. At the same time, I realized that if a large truck is driving directly into the wind, it is less likely to turn over. But driving into the wind is harder; it takes more fuel and sometimes it would be easier to turn around and drive with the wind instead.

When my son, Trent, was a boy, I remember picking him up from Little League baseball practice. It was very

windy, and as we walked back to our car, we saw something remarkable. A bird was flying into the wind. It was flapping its wings with all the strength it could muster and wasn't making any headway at all. The bird was not moving forward or backward. All it could do was maintain its position. Finally, the force of the wind was too much for the bird. It turned, and as it did, the winds filled its wings and swooped it toward a very different destination than where it had been trying to go.

### The Problem

That's the problem with the prevailing winds of our culture. They don't always blow in the direction we are supposed to be going, so we only have a few choices. If we drive or fly or sail into the wind, it is hard to make headway. If we go with the wind, it's easier, but we won't get to

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our chosen destination. And if we're traveling with a crosswind and carrying a big load, we're likely to get blown over.

This is what we Christians are always having to do; we must navigate the winds of our culture, making sure the direction we're going is not set by the prevailing winds of our culture, but by the eternal words of our Lord.

The winds will change. Often the winds of culture will be against us. Sometimes the winds of culture may actually be behind us, helping us. But if our desire is to one day arrive Home, we set our sails accordingly, no matter

which way the winds blow, even if sometimes it feels



John Gulley

we're not making any headway at all.

There's nothing new about Christians flying against the wind of culture. But these

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days the winds seem to be blowing harder against what at one time almost everyone thought was good. The culture we live in seems to be more hostile, less civil. Maybe I'm just getting older and grumpier, but I'm not the only one who feels this way.

In the last few years, there has been a noticeable spike in books telling us how to be more civil. Consider some of the titles: *Rules of Civility*; *Mastering Civility*; *The Civility Solution: What to Do When People Are Rude*; *The Case for Civility*; *And Why Our Future Depends on It*; *Saving Civility*; *How Civility Works*; *Mere Civility: Disagreements and the Limits of Tolerance*; *Civility in the*

*Digital Age: How Companies and Individuals Can Triumph Over Hate, Trolls, Bullies and Other Jerks*; *In Search of Civility: Confronting Civility on the College Campus*; and my favorite civility book title, *Civility Unleashed!*

Christian thinker and Yale law professor Stephen Carter began writing about this alarming trend twenty years ago. He

warned about the civil corrosion of our society in a book he simply titled, *Civility*. In his book he gives an illustration you might identify with.

**After being cut off by another driver in traffic and slamming on your brakes, . . . you swing into the next fast food joint for a quick bite, and you wait in**

**We must navigate the winds of our culture, making sure our direction is not set by the prevailing winds of our culture.**

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line behind two bickering kids, continuing in their loud and most irritating whine an argument that has obviously been with them for some days or weeks or years, and then you jump two inches into the air because across the room there is a terrific crash as somebody knocks over a display of some cartoon character whose countenance never bothered you before but does now. And the person who walked into the sign, booming with laughter, walks on out the door, making no move to pick it up, but nobody who works in the restaurant moves either, and now it is your turn at the counter, and once more there are no words of welcome, only a glassy, empty stare from a teenager who would rather be doing anything else, legal or illegal, than spending a few minutes serving a customer, and when she gets your order wrong and then blames you for it, expression finally

coming into her voice as she says, "You didn't tell me that," and you want to snap at her, but you restrain yourself, accepting this treatment, as though because she is a mere child and not well-raised, she can do what she pleases, and so you make your uneasy way out of the restaurant, your blood pressure elevated more by the ill treatment than by all the salt, and you return to your car, under the wiper of which some unknown entrepreneur has placed a flyer encouraging you to come in for a free reading of your palm, and with your hands full of fast food and the refuse containers in the parking lot already bursting with debris, you face the classic urban dilemma, add to the trash in the car or add to the trash on the street, and you decide to be good, you fold the flyer between your fingers and drop it on the seat and then you are once more on the way to work,

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and you try the radio, and on one station the host is calling everyone who disagrees with him idiotic, and on the next, the candidates for Congress are accusing each other of corruption, but the third station, at least, carries music, even if the principal subjects seem to be drugs and rape, and so you select the all-news station and are told in gleeful detail of what murders and molestations occurred overnight, and borne on by these glad tidings you at last arrive at your job where you are expected to be polite.

Is there anyone who hasn't felt Carter's frustration? Our culture has always had problems, but it seems to many that the winds are changing,

blowing harder against our efforts to live righteous lives and raise righteous children.

I notice it sometimes in the television shows that are popular. When I was a boy, *Gilligan's Island* was a popular show, a mindless, innocuous comedy of people shipwrecked on a deserted island. When I was in college, the show *Fantasy Island* came out. It was a

bit more risqué, as it told stories of people traveling to a mysterious island hoping to fulfill their personal fantasies, not all of them noble. In the year 2000, all pretense was thrown aside when the reality show *Temptation Island* entertained its audience by having couples spend the weekend

**Our culture has always had problems, but are the winds blowing harder against our efforts to live righteous lives?**

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with someone other than their own partners!

Perhaps it's not surprising that in 2010 America went nuts over another island show, an epoch story of people whose emotional and behavioral baggage sent them into what ended up being essentially a seven-year purgatory to somehow atone for all their sin. The title was descriptive of the culture that loved it, *Lost*.

### **We Want to Do Something!**

As Christians, we look at our culture and sometimes just want to shout, to do something. Sometimes it seems our society has lost whatever we had left of civility and decency and holiness. And yet it seems the very values and beliefs we

Christians want to call people back to are increasingly seen as the problem in our society, not the solution. Many see Christians as intolerant, judgmental, exclusive, arrogant, and self-righteous.

We plead with our government not to kill what we believe is a precious life inside a mother's womb, and in response we are told that

we're imposing our narrow, judgmental values on others.

We ask our government not to legalize same-sex marriage, and though we hold no ill will toward our neighbors whose sexual orientation differs from us, still we are branded as intolerant and homophobic. And because of our beliefs, we are blamed for the brutal and

**At times, it seems that Christians are convenient scapegoats for our country's problems.**



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vicious treatment of homosexuals in our land.

We ask our science teachers not to present an atheistic, materialistic worldview as the only intellectually acceptable position to make sense out of the universe we live in, and rather than respecting our worldview as a reasonable alternative, they often ridicule us as ignorant, anti-intellectual Neanderthals.

Sometimes it seems people are using Christians as a scapegoat for our country's problems. Our frustration is understandable. It's not fair; it's not right. Somebody ought to do something. We're citizens, too! We have rights, too! Isn't it time we stand up for our rights? But is demanding our rights the best way to sail these stormy winds? Is that the wind we want to fill our sails?

"Rights" is an important word to us Americans. Our founding documents are filled with the word. Our Declaration of



Curtis Shelburne

Independence begins, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights."

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attitude is typified by the impassioned declaration, "I know my rights!"

So it is not surprising that when we feel our faith is unfairly treated, we are inclined to demand our rights and engage in political battles. We are blessed in this country to have the freedom to do this. And there is certainly nothing wrong with working to make sure all people are treated fairly and equally.

But as important as the truths of equal rights are in our country, I wonder if the Apostle Peter might encourage us to consider other truths that might be even more important than our rights. Listen to his counsel in a letter to believers who were struggling with cultural winds even stormier than ours.

**Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the**

Included in our Constitution is our "Bill of Rights." Over the years, we've fought passionately in this country for equal rights and civil rights. The distinctive American

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emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is

conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it,

this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly (1 Peter 2:13-23).

### An Apostle and His Heart

Peter may have not lived in a democracy, but he was not unaware of his rights.

**It is not surprising that when we feel our faith is unfairly treated, we are inclined to engage in political battles.**

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As a child of Abraham, he knew he had a right not to be a slave to Rome. And there was a time when he was very concerned about his rights. A major reason he decided to follow Christ was to claim his right to freedom, to take back God's land and to serve alongside his Messiah.

No doubt Peter's heart was stirred by the words of John the Baptist, who wasn't afraid to rebuke Rome and the wicked Jewish leaders who collaborated with her. Peter was ready to fight, defend, stand up for what was right. And he showed it when they came to arrest Jesus. He pulled out his sword and attacked, no doubt thinking his Messiah would be impressed with his valor.

But Jesus turned out to be a different kind of Messiah. He said, "Put your sword away." Peter did, and then he followed and watched

his Messiah, and what he saw surely inspired what he later would write. "When they hurled their insults at Messiah, he did not retaliate. When Messiah suffered, he made no threats. Instead,

he entrusted himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23).

It would take some time, but Peter finally got it. He finally discovered the best way to navigate the winds of his culture was not by drawing his sword but by taking up his cross. Rather than chopping off people's ears,

**The Apostle Peter learned that changing people's hearts was more important than chopping off their ears.**

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Peter learned how to change people's hearts, and thus he shows us how to change the hearts of doctors to see unborn lives as precious, how to change the hearts of scientists to see a universe without God as empty, how to change the hearts of Hollywood executives to see immorality as unprofitable.

### An Attitude to Emulate

Peter even discovered how to change the hearts of believers who are frustrated, who think things are not fair and something should be done about it. Peter learned that there was something he could do. Peter had seen firsthand the best way to navigate the winds of hate and fear and hostility. The navigator was

Jesus, and his ship was a cross.

Seeing the cross of Christ, Peter saw a different kind of attitude, an attitude of humility and submission and love. Paul described it this way:

**Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard**

**equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is**

**“On the cross, Jesus set aside his rights in an attitude of complete humility and submission and love.”**

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**above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11).**

Talk about equal rights! Jesus had equal rights with God. But he gave up his rights and submitted to death. And what has happened since Jesus set sail to the cross? Knees have bowed; tongues have confessed. Throughout history, the world has changed. History is filled with all kinds

of revolutions and revolutionaries. Most come with



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swords, forcing change on people, filling streets with blood.

Even our own sophisticated form of revolution, which comes around every four years when political power changes without blood, is not done without the destruction of lives.



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But the Jesus Revolution changes the world without spilling blood, except the blood of its Leader. It is a revolution that needs only one sword, the Word of God; it is a revolution where enemies are loved, and victories are forever.

## A Very Difficult Time

Peter is writing to Christians who live in a very difficult time. The world does not accept them. Their world ridicules them at best and persecutes them at worst. Peter gives these early Christians a strategy for how to navigate in their world.

First, he tells them that it is very important to resist the prevailing winds around us. “I urge you, as strangers and

aliens in this world, to abstain from sinful desires which war against your soul” (1 Peter 2:11).

“Don’t give up,” he is saying. “Don’t let the winds of this culture determine the direction of your life. God doesn’t want you going where these winds so often are blowing.”

It is very important to resist. Our choices must be determined not by what is popular to our peers, but by what is honoring to our Lord.

We must resist the winds that move us to clutter our houses with things, clutter our calendars with busyness, clutter our minds with foolishness, clutter our lives with emptiness. We must resist the winds that move us to watch indiscriminately, dress

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immodestly, speak irreverently, or act insensitively.

## Sailing Into the Wind

Sometimes, we have to sail right into the wind.

But even more important than the direction we are going, is the manner in which we are living.

“Live such good lives among the pagans,” Peter writes, “that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your good works and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Peter 2:12).

If we really don’t like the way the winds are blowing, and if we really want them to change, the best way is not to draw our swords. We cannot change government by forcing government to be Christian. We cannot change Hollywood

by forcing Hollywood to be Christian. We cannot change schools by forcing schools to be Christian. We change the world by living in the world in such

a way that the world is won to Christ, one person at a time.

When people see us honor our leaders even when our leaders are not always honorable; when people see us speak and act with kindness

even when we are unkindly treated; when people see us disagree with people without being disagreeable to people; when people see us have the courage to speak the truth we believe but also the grace to speak the truth in love and in humility; when people see us realize that loving truth is not the same thing as having truth;

**We change the world by living in the world in such a way that the world is won by Christ, one person at a time.**

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when people see us not repay evil with evil, insult with insult, but instead speak blessing to others; when people see us entrust ourselves to the One who judges justly . . .

In other words, when people see us no longer consider our rights as something to be grasped, but instead see us making ourselves nothing, becoming servants to others, then hearts will change, schools will change, communities will change. And as they do, even a world can change.

Of course, this is not an easy life. This isn't a quick fix. But why would we think following Jesus would be easy or the coming of the Kingdom would be quick? Jesus certainly never promised it would be.

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me,” says our Lord (Matthew 16:24). Change takes time, usually a lifetime.

We are called to navigate the winds of our culture by filling our sails with a different kind of wind, the wind of the Spirit. Did you know that is what the Greek word for “Spirit” means? *Pneuma* means “wind.”

Sometimes the winds of culture blow against the Spirit's wind. Sometimes the winds of culture blow with it. Our job is to be good sailors, turning our sails so they are filled with the Spirit's wind, so that whichever way the winds of culture may be blowing, we are always sailing toward Home.



**When people see us not grasping our rights, but making ourselves servants instead, hearts will change.**

**“LIVE  
SUCH GOOD  
LIVES  
among the  
unbelievers  
that, though  
they accuse you  
of wrong, they  
may see your  
good deeds,  
and glorify  
God on the  
day he visits  
us.”**

✱ 1 Peter 2

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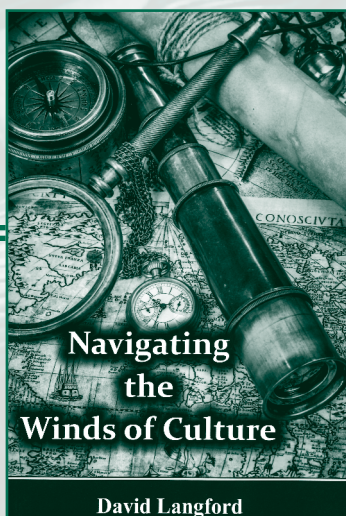
by

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*Jesus prayed that we would be "in the world but not of it." What does that mean?*

*Navigating the Winds of Culture*



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