

TRUE NORTH



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On November 24, 1877 the USS Huron sunk off the NC Coast. According to historical records the ship left Hampton Roads, VA and was headed to Havana, Cuba on a reconnaissance mission. It never arrived.¹

In the aftermath of the shipwreck, it was determined that a sudden storm, combined with a small error in the ship's compass were to blame for the tragedy. In all, 98 sailors lost their lives.

A slight error in the compass – disastrous consequences.

In 1 Corinthians 1, the Apostle Paul addresses an error in the spiritual compass of this young church. Here is how Paul describes it: *“What I mean is that each one of you says, ‘I follow Paul,’ or ‘I follow Apollos,’ or ‘I follow Cephas,’ or ‘I follow Christ.’”* (1 Cor. 12)

It was a small but significant shift that happened in Corinth. Subtly, perhaps subconsciously, the Corinthians had shifted their focus to the servants of Christ, rather than Christ himself. As these men became bigger in their field of vision, Christ became smaller, and it threatened to shipwreck their faith.

¹ <https://archaeology.ncdcr.gov/uab/heritage-dive-sites/huron>

This threat to the church in Corinth reminds us to re-calibrate our spiritual compass. In what ways are we tempted to make the same mistake the Corinthians did?

The most obvious temptation is to make our churches a cult of personality. Christians can become so enamored with a gifted leader, that the church resembles a group of fans, rather than followers of Jesus. In our celebrity-obsessed culture we have to guard against a celebrity mindset in the church.

A celebrity pastor should be an oxymoron. “But whoever would be great among you must be your servant.” (Mark 10:43) As one author writes, “There is only one pedestal in the kingdom of God, and only one person to be put on it. But it isn’t a statue to be put up as monument in a town square. It is a cross; and the messiah who hung and died on it passed judgment on all human fame, celebrity, popularity and reputation.”²

Man-centered religion can also creep into the church through adapting God’s truth to conventional wisdom and worldly philosophies. People can be very convincing, even when communicating something false. How else do people end up in cults? How else do dictators rise to positions of power? The wisdom of this world can be very convincing. When we start adapting the Word of God to mere human opinions our spiritual compass is damaged. When we ignore what the Bible says on creation, sexuality, gender, absolute truth and the exclusivity of Christ we are no longer following God but men. This is a call to prayer and spiritual alertness. We need to continually ask ourselves: In what ways might the world be influencing my beliefs/behaviors?

Lastly, there is one person that we are most likely to follow more than any other. Who is it? It is ourselves. In our hyper-individualized society, the god of self is the one we are most likely to follow instead of Jesus. In our “spiritual, but not religious” culture, feelings and experiences become the ultimate authority. This preoccupation with ourselves is the complete antithesis of the gospel. Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, let him *deny himself*, take up his cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:34) It is self-denial and not self-fulfillment that is at the heart of the gospel. We are to guard against a faith that makes our feelings and experiences, rather than objective truth our ultimate spiritual authority.

Is it possible for our spiritual compass to go off track? Of course, it is. There is always a temptation to shift from a focus on God, to a focus on man. The ultimate safeguard to these temptations is to continually re-orient ourselves to true north. What is true north? As Paul will go on to say, it is Christ. It is the cross. It is, “*Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.*” Only Christ has pursued us in divine love. Only Christ was crucified for us.

With our eyes on Jesus, our compass cannot fail.

² Wright, N.T., *Paul For Everyone: 1 Corinthians*, page 35.

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