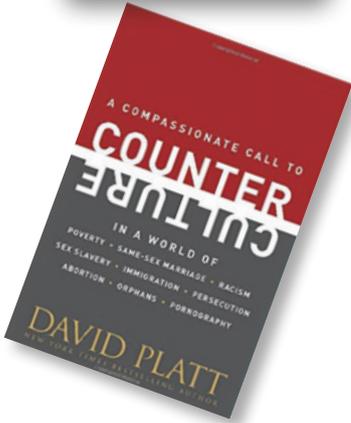




Book Review



Counter Culture: A Compassionate Call to Counter Culture in a World of Poverty, Same-Sex Marriage, Racism, Sex Slavery, Immigration, Abortion, Persecution, Orphans and Pornography by David Platt
(Tyndale House Publishers, 2015)



On social issues, Christians have recently been on the defensive. Cultural changes have shifted the ground beneath our feet. We find ourselves defending our beliefs against an often hostile audience who once shared common values with us. This situation has frequently led us to withdraw from engaging in various social issues that plague our fallen world. When we do engage with the world, it's usually based on what is least costly for us in the context of our culture.

In his recent book, *Counter Culture*, David Platt makes the case for Christians to go on the offensive. Not an aggressive offensive, but a compassionate offensive. For Platt, the core of our mission is the Gospel. He sees the Gospel as the solution; but it can also be the problem. He says that in confronting the world the biggest issue is not our beliefs on sexuality or abortion. The biggest issue is the Gospel itself. He writes: 'The most offensive claim in Christianity is that God is the Creator, Owner, and Judge of every person on the planet.' (p 16)

Platt argues that this truth is the real cause of our clash with secular culture. Yet our response should not be less Gospel but more. We need to understand the Gospel more and the world needs to see the Gospel more at work in us. When we truly understand the Gospel it transforms how we see the world around us: it calls us to truly love people as God loves them. We will put aside superficial notions of what it means to follow God and give our lives in sacrificial service to our neighbours. We will be the salt and light they so badly need: 'My purpose is to show how the [G]ospel moves Christians to counter all of these issues in our culture with conviction, compassion, and courage.' (p 18)

Of course, to do this we need to have a clear understanding of what the Gospel is. If I have one criticism about this book, it's that Platt's definition of the Gospel is a little too individualistic – it's about what Jesus has done to save each of us personally. But I see the Gospel as bigger than that: it's also about what God is doing with his people in the church, building them into a body to his glory (Ephesians 3:2-11; Colossians 1:15-23).

Nevertheless, a concern for the body of Christ as a whole seeps through everything Platt writes. We – believers and non-believers – are all people for whom Christ has died. As believers, we work together to restore all people to our Creator within that one unified body of Christ. This is the Good News, both for the future and the here and now.

So Platt affirms the central place of the Gospel as the defining narrative in our lives. After that, he unpacks what this means for many of the issues facing us today – issues like poverty, abortion, sexual immorality, marriage and race relations. What light does the good news of Jesus shine on these issues? How does the Gospel change our thinking about ourselves and our relationship to those around us? How can we make a difference in a fallen and hostile world without compromising the truth of the Gospel?

The topics Platt covers demand a consistent and biblical response from us. In doing this, Platt draws on both his theological and pastoral experience. He shares his own journey, wrestling with his conscience, seeking to reconcile what the Gospel was clearly telling him with what he had always been comfortable doing. His candour challenges us to reflect deeply on ourselves. Do we really believe the Gospel enough to let it change our lives? As disciples of Jesus, how are we called to live in our culture?

Such practical questions form the heart of the book. Platt then calls for action. To spur us, at the end of each chapter there are helpful suggestions as to how we can put these ideas into practice. There are things to pray about, Scriptures to dwell on and simple steps to begin the journey.

This book is easy to read. Yet, I found it provocative and challenging. The book is a call to heed the Gospel of Jesus Christ as Lord of every aspect of our lives. It's a call to embrace passionately the Gospel life. That call is radically counter-cultural, but one we all need to hear. The Gospel really is good news, capable of transforming us and the rest of the world. ■

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