

REVISED &
UPDATED

COUNTER CULTURE

FOLLOWING CHRIST
IN AN ANTI-CHRISTIAN AGE

DAVID PLATT

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

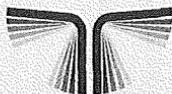
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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Retreat or Risk? xi

CHAPTER 1

The Greatest Offense: The Gospel and Culture 1

CHAPTER 2

Where Rich and Poor Collide: The Gospel and Poverty 25

CHAPTER 3

Modern Holocaust: The Gospel and Abortion 59

CHAPTER 4

**The Lonely in Families:
The Gospel and Orphans and Widows 81**

CHAPTER 5

A War on Women: The Gospel and Sex Slavery 109

CHAPTER 6

A Profound Mystery: The Gospel and Marriage 133

CHAPTER 7

Bought with a Price: The Gospel and Sexual Morality 159

CHAPTER 8

Unity in Diversity: The Gospel and Ethnicity 189

CHAPTER 9

Unprecedented Crisis: The Gospel and Refugees 217

CHAPTER 10

**Christ in the Public Square:
The Gospel and Religious Liberty 237**

CONCLUSION

Let's Risk It All 261

Acknowledgments 281

Notes 283

About the Author 291

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THE GREATEST OFFENSE: THE GOSPEL AND CULTURE

The gospel is the lifeblood of Christianity, and it provides the foundation for countering culture. For when we truly believe the gospel, we begin to realize that the gospel not only *compels* Christians to confront social issues in the culture around us. The gospel actually *creates* confrontation with the culture around—and within—us.

It is increasingly common for biblical views on social issues to be labeled insulting. We know that it's offensive to an ever-expanding number of people to say that a woman who has feelings for another woman should not express love for her in marriage. It doesn't take long for a Christian to be backed into a corner on this issue, not wanting to be offensive yet wondering how to respond.

But this is where we must recognize that a biblical view of homosexuality is not the greatest offense in Christianity. In fact,

it's nowhere close to the greatest offense in Christianity. The gospel itself is a much, much greater offense. We need to start, then, with exploring what the gospel is, and we need to ask ourselves, Do we actually believe it? Our answer to this question fundamentally determines how we live in our culture.

IN THE BEGINNING, GOD

The gospel's offense begins with the very first words of the Bible.¹ "In the beginning, God . . ." (Genesis 1:1). The initial affront of the gospel is that there is a God by, through, and for whom all things begin. "The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 40:28). Because all things begin with God and ultimately exist for God, nothing in all creation is irrelevant to him.

What is this Creator like? "I am the LORD, your Holy One," God says in Isaiah 43:15. In other words, he is wholly unique—unlike us and incomparable to us. He is of another kind. God is absolutely pure, and there is nothing wrong in him. Nothing. Everything God is and everything God does is right. He is without error and without equal.

This holy God is also good. "The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made" (Psalm 145:9). God's goodness is evident from the start of Scripture, where everything he creates is called "good," culminating in man and woman, who are called "very good" (see Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). The universal grandeur of creation testifies to the undeniable goodness of the Creator.

God's goodness is expressed in his justice. "The LORD judges the peoples" (Psalm 7:8), and he judges them perfectly. God justifies the innocent and condemns the guilty. Consequently, "he who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are

both alike an abomination to the LORD” (Proverbs 17:15). As a good Judge, God is outraged by injustice. He detests those who say to the wicked, “You are good,” and those who say to the good, “You are wicked.” God is a perfect Judge.

God’s goodness is also expressed in his grace. He shows free and unmerited favor to those who could never deserve it. He is compassionate and patient, desiring all people everywhere to know and enjoy his kindness, mercy, and love (see 2 Peter 3:9).

Consider, then, the confrontation created by the reality of God in each of our lives. Because God is our Creator, we belong to him. The one who created us owns us. We are not, as the poem “Invictus” describes, the masters of our own fate or the captains of our own souls. The Author of all creation possesses authority over all creation, including you and me. And we are accountable to him as our Judge. One of the core truths of the gospel is that God will judge every person, and he will be just. This puts us in a position where we desperately need his grace.

Now we see the offense of the gospel coming to the forefront. Tell any modern person that there is a God who sustains, owns, defines, rules, and one day will judge him or her, and that person will balk in offense. Any person would—and every person has. This is our natural reaction to God.

OUR NATURAL REACTION TO GOD

Look at the opening pages of human history, and you will see the ultimate problem of the human heart. When God creates man, God puts him in the Garden of Eden and says, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die” (Genesis 2:16-17, NIV). Here we see God’s holiness, goodness, justice, and grace on display. God has authority

to define what is right and wrong, good and evil, based upon his pure and holy character. God makes clear to man that he will be judged based upon his obedience to the command God has given. God's grace is evident, for he does not hide his law. In love, God tells man the way to life and exhorts him to walk in it.

So how does the created respond to the Creator? Within a matter of only a few verses, temptation to sin sits on the table. The serpent asks the first woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'? . . . You will not surely die. . . . For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:1, 4-5, NIV).

Do you see the role reversal here? It all begins when the command of God is reduced to questions about God. Is God really holy? Does he really know what is right? Is God really good? Does he really want what is best for me? Amid such questions, man and woman subtly assert themselves not as the ones to be judged by God but as the ones who sit in judgment of him.

The serpent's question revolves around the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We may read the tree's name and think, *What's so wrong with knowing the difference between good and evil?* But the meaning of Scripture here goes beyond *information* about good and evil to the *determination* of good and evil. In other words, for the man and woman to eat from this tree was to reject God as the one who determines good and evil and to assume this responsibility themselves. The temptation in the Garden was to rebel against God's authority and in the process make humans the arbiters of morality.

When we understand this first sin, we realize that the moral relativism of the twenty-first century is nothing new. When we attempt to usurp (or even eliminate) God, we lose objectivity for determining what is good and evil, right and wrong, moral and

immoral. Noted agnostic philosopher of science Michael Ruse echoes this when he says, “The position of the modern evolutionist, therefore, is that . . . morality is a biological adaptation no less than are hands and feet and teeth. . . . Considered as a rationally justifiable set of claims about an objective something, it is illusory.”² Similarly, noted atheist Richard Dawkins writes:

In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at the bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, and no other good. Nothing but blind, pitiless indifference. DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is. And we dance to its music.³

Godless worldviews thus leave us with a hopeless subjectivity concerning good and evil that is wholly dependent on social constructs. Whatever a culture deems right is right, and whatever a culture deems wrong is wrong. This is precisely the worldview that prevails in American culture today, where rapid shifts in the moral landscape clearly communicate that we no longer believe certain things are inherently right or wrong. Instead, rightness and wrongness is determined by social developments around us.

But aren't the implications of this approach to morality frightening? Consider sex trafficking around the world. Are we willing to conclude that as long as a society approves of this industry, it is no longer immoral? Are we willing to tell young girls sold into sex slavery that they and the men who take advantage of them are merely dancing to their DNA, that what is happening to them is not inherently evil, and that they are just products of a blind,

WELCOME TO THE FRONT LINES.

Everywhere we turn, battle lines are being drawn—traditional marriage vs. gay marriage, pro-life vs. pro-choice, personal freedom vs. governmental protection. Seemingly overnight, culture has shifted to the point where right and wrong are no longer measured by universal truth but by popular opinion. And as difficult conversations continue to inject themselves into our lives, Christians everywhere are asking the same question:

HOW ARE WE SUPPOSED TO RESPOND TO ALL THIS?

Do we resign ourselves to **pessimism**, convinced our society has collapsed?

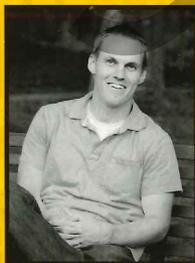
Or do we reassure ourselves with **optimism**, confident we will win the culture war?

David Platt shows us a better way: **realism and risk**.

In this **revised and updated edition** of *Counter Culture*, David Platt provides a gospel perspective on issues such as poverty, abortion, sex trafficking, and racism, as well as the legalization of same-sex marriage, the controversial transgender issue, and the overwhelming refugee crisis. Drawing on compelling personal accounts from around the world, Platt presents an unapologetic yet winsome call for Christians to faithfully follow Christ in an anti-Christian age in ways that will prove both costly and rewarding.

THE LINES HAVE BEEN DRAWN.

ARE YOU PREPARED? DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE RISKS?



DAVID PLATT is deeply devoted to Christ and his Word, and his first love in ministry is disciple making. David is the president of the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board and the founder of Radical, Inc. (radical.net). The author of the *New York Times* bestselling books *Follow Me* and *Radical*, he has traveled extensively around the world, teaching the Bible and training church leaders.

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