

BECAUSE WE ARE  
CALLED TO  
**COUNTER**  
**CULTURE**

IN A WORLD OF

POVERTY • SAME-SEX MARRIAGE • RACISM  
SEX SLAVERY • IMMIGRATION • PERSECUTION  
ABORTION • ORPHANS • PORNOGRAPHY

**DAVID PLATT**  
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*Because We Are Called to Counter Culture: In a World of Poverty, Same-Sex Marriage, Racism, Sex Slavery, Immigration, Persecution, Abortion, Orphans, and Pornography*

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Designed by Dean H. Renninger

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# COUNTERING CULTURE

Imagine standing at the height of all the earth and seeing the depth of human poverty.

Journey with me to the middle of the Himalayan mountains, where not long ago I met men and women striving for survival. Half the children in these particular villages die before their eighth birthday. Many don't make it to their first. Meet Radha, a mom who would have fourteen kids if twelve of them hadn't died before adulthood. Meet Kunsing, a disabled child who spent the first twelve years of his life chained in a barn because his family thought he was cursed. Meet Chimie, a toddler whose brother and sister

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died when he was two months old, leading his mom to commit suicide and his dad to pass him around desperately to any woman in the village who could provide nourishment.

Just as shocking as those you meet are those you don't. Some of the villages in these mountains are virtually devoid of young girls between the ages of five and fifteen. Their parents were persuaded by the promises of a better life for their daughters, so they sent them off with men who turned out to be traffickers. Most of these girls live to see their eighth birthday, but by their sixteenth birthday they are forced to have sex with thousands of customers. They will never see their families again.

When we meet people, hear stories, and see faces of injustice like this around the world, it is altogether right for us to respond with compassion, conviction, and courage. Compassion overwhelms us because we care

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deeply for children, parents, and families whose lives are filled with pain and suffering. Conviction overtakes us, for every one of us knows instinctively that stories like these should not be so. It is not right for half the children in these Himalayan villages to die before their eighth birthday. It is not fair for children born with disabilities to be chained in barns for their entire lives. It is unjust for pimps to deceive parents into selling their precious daughters as sex slaves. Ultimately, such compassion and conviction fuel courage—courage to do something, *anything*, for the sake of Radha, Kunsing, Chimie, these girls, their parents, their villages, and countless other children, women, and men like them around the world.

In light of these global realities, I am greatly encouraged when I see such compassion, conviction, and courage in the church today. As I listen to the way contemporary

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Christians talk (especially, though not exclusively, younger evangelicals), I perceive fierce opposition to injustice regarding the poor, the orphan, and the enslaved. I observe increased awareness of social issues: a plethora of books written, conferences organized, and movements started that revolve around fighting hunger, alleviating poverty, and ending sex trafficking. In the middle of it all, I sense deep dissatisfaction with indifference in the church. We simply aren't content with a church that turns a blind eye and a deaf ear to the realities of social injustice in the world. We want our lives—and the church—to count for social justice.

Yet while I'm deeply encouraged by the expressed zeal of so many Christians for certain social issues, I'm profoundly concerned by the lack of zeal among these same Christians (especially, though again not exclusively, younger evangelicals) for other

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social issues. On popular issues like poverty and slavery, where Christians are likely to be applauded for our social action, we are quick to stand up and speak out. Yet on controversial issues like homosexuality and abortion, where Christians are likely to be criticized for our involvement, we are content to sit down and stay quiet. It's as if we've decided to pick and choose which social issues we'll contest and which we'll concede. And our picking and choosing normally revolves around what is most comfortable—and least costly—for us in our culture.

If you ask practically any popular Christian leader in the public square to make a statement on poverty, sex trafficking, or the orphan crisis, that leader will gladly, boldly, and clearly share his or her convictions. However, if you ask the same Christian leader in the same public setting to make a statement on homosexuality or abortion,

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that leader will respond with either nervous hesitancy or virtual heresy, if he or she responds at all. “That’s not the issue I’m concerned with,” the leader might say. “My focus is on this other issue, and that’s what I want to speak about.”

The practical effect of this is evident across the contemporary Christian landscape. All sorts of younger evangelicals write blogs, take pictures, send tweets, and attend conferences where they fight to alleviate poverty and end slavery. Other evangelicals care for foster children in the United States and adopt orphans from around the world. Many of these efforts are good, and we should continue in them. What is problematic, however, is when these same evangelicals stay silent in conversations about more culturally controversial issues like abortion or so-called same-sex marriage. *Those issues are not my concern,*

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they think. *I'm more comfortable talking about other issues.*

But what if Christ commands us to make these issues our concern? And what if Christ's call in our lives is not to comfort in our culture? What if Christ in us actually compels us to counter our culture? Not to quietly sit and watch evolving cultural trends and not to subtly shift our views amid changing cultural tides, but to courageously share and show our convictions through what we say and how we live, even (or especially) when these convictions contradict the popular positions of our day. And to do all of this not with conceited minds or calloused hearts, but with the humble compassion of Christ on constant display in everything we say and do.

Isn't this, after all, the essence of what it means to follow Christ in the first place? "If anyone would come after me, let him deny

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himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Talk about countercultural. In a world where everything revolves around yourself—protect yourself, promote yourself, comfort yourself, and take care of yourself—Jesus says, “Crucify yourself. Put aside all self-preservation in order to live for God’s glorification, no matter what that means for you in the culture around you.”

And isn’t this, after all, the main issue in any culture? Maybe better stated, isn’t *he* the main issue in any culture? What if the main issue in our culture today is not poverty or sex trafficking, homosexuality or abortion? What if the main issue is *God*? And what might happen if we made *him* our focus instead? In a world marked by sex slavery and sexual immorality, the abandonment of children and the murder of children, racism and persecution, the needs of the poor and the neglect of the widow, how would we act if

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we fixed our gaze on the holiness, love, goodness, truth, justice, authority, and mercy of God revealed in the gospel?

These are the questions driving me, and I invite you to explore them with me. I don't by any means claim to know all the answers. But I've got this sense that if we take an honest look at our lives, our families, and our churches, we may realize that much of our supposed social justice is actually a selective social injustice. We may recognize that what we thought were separate social issues are in fact all intimately connected to our understanding of who God is and what God is doing in the world. In the process, we may find that the same heart of God that moves us to war against sex trafficking also moves us to war against sexual immorality. We may discover that the same gospel that compels us to combat poverty also compels us to defend marriage. And in the end, we may resolve

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to rearrange our lives, families, and churches around a more consistent, Christ-compelled, countercultural response to the most pressing social issues of our day.

Inevitably, God will lead us to act in different ways. Not every one of us can give equal attention to all the issues I've described. No one can fight sex trafficking while fostering and adopting children in the middle of starting a ministry for widows and counseling unwed mothers while traveling around the world to support the persecuted church—and so on. Nor *should* any one of us do all these things, for God sovereignly puts us in unique positions and places with unique privileges and opportunities to influence the culture around us. But what is necessary for all of us is to view each of these cultural issues through the lens of biblical truth and to speak such truth with conviction whenever we have the chance to do so. Then, based

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on consistent conviction, we seek how individually as Christians and collectively in our churches the Spirit of Christ is leading us to compassionate action in our culture.

In order to help us in this, I've offered some initial suggestions for practical requests you and I can pray in light of these issues, potential ways you or I might engage culture with the gospel, and biblical truths we must proclaim regarding every one of these issues. These suggestions will also point you to a website where you can explore more specific steps you might take. I encourage you to consider all these suggestions and to humbly, boldly, seriously, and prayerfully consider what God is directing you to do. Let's not merely contemplate the Word of God in the world around us; let's do what it says (see James 1:22-25).

To be sure, what we conclude about countering culture may prove costly for you

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and me. But by that point, I don't think this will matter much. For our eyes will no longer be focused on what is most comfortable to us; instead, our lives will be fixed on what is most glorifying to God, and in him we will find far greater reward than anything our culture could ever offer us.