

Blind Spots: What Have We Missed?

Neil Girrard

Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are from David Platt,
Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream,
Multnomah Books, 2010.

Picture a room, perhaps deep in a dark dungeon where no light ever penetrates. Inside this room lives a man who one day discovers a crack that leads to the outside sunshine. Every day a tiny but powerful beam of light illuminates a tiny spot on the floor when the sun stands at just the right angle and then goes away as the sun goes down. Time goes on and circumstances and events enlarge the hole and soon an entire corner of his room is illuminated. From this scant basis of experience and understanding the man begins to write books about light and darkness and even talks about having blind spots that keep people from living in the light. But the man never leaves his darkened room in the dungeon.

In *Radical*, David Platt has put forth a book that he intends to challenge his readers – and there have been many readers, the book is on the New York Times bestseller list – to embrace not merely a radical Christianity but a *biblically* radical Christianity. It is evident that the Spirit of God has indeed been at work illuminating life for David Platt – no one who has experienced any of the depths of Christ’s Spirit would deny the many truths that are discussed throughout his book nor question Platt’s zeal and enthusiasm for reaching and impacting the nations (all people groups) for Christ. But his book suffers tremendous loss because what the Lord has shown and done in Platt has been forced through the defining filter and prism of the “church” paradigm. In the end, though the author intends to challenge his readers to a “radical” depth of life with Christ, the book truly only succeeds in becoming a snare for wealthy people (few others can afford to buy his book and the poor simply cannot practice what he is preaching) that confirms their right to be just a “little bit” worldly by deluding them into believing they can have their wealth and their “church” and Jesus too! In this somewhat lengthy review, let us analyze Platt’s ideas and compare them to even more radical truth and light that is more rightly divided from the pages of the New Testament.

A Tiny Spot of Light

Platt wrote, “We all have blind spots – areas of our lives that need to be uncovered so that we can see correctly and adjust our lives accordingly. But they are hard to identify. Others can often see them in us, and we rely on friends to point them out. But the reality is, even then we have a hard time recognizing them. We don’t want to admit they exist...often until it’s too late. We discover them in hindsight, but we struggle to see them in the present.” (p. 107)

Throughout the book, Platt makes statements like, “I do not claim to have all the answers. If anything, I have more questions than answers.” (p. 3, etc.) One must wonder then why so many of his precepts (*some* of which are only his own reasonings based on his belief in the “church” paradigm and other “theology” pieces he’s picked up during his spiritual journey) are presented as answers and not questions. In spite of this intellectual hypocrisy, Platt does seem to have a genuine hunger for Christ – “My biggest fear, even now, is that I will hear Jesus’ words and walk away, content to settle for less than radical obedience to Him.” (p. 3) – but will Platt, and those who think and believe as he does, reject the words of the Savior that are contained in this analysis of his book?

Platt wrote, “My goal [in the chapter from which the above quote regarding blind spots comes] is to share with you how God has been opening my eyes to a major blind spot in my life and in the church I lead.” (p. 113) Here Platt admits to having received a healing from spiritual blindness in his own life and in the lives of the people who follow him. But he presents his views as definitive answers and does not yet, as we shall see, recognize that he only sees people walking around who look like trees. (see Mk. 8:24) Will Platt and his followers persist on in Christ until they receive the second touch of the Master? (Mk. 8:25) Or will they be content and think they have received all the answers they will ever need and that they have the pattern for all of churchianity to follow? The form given at the end of the book (p. 218-219) would suggest that Platt thinks he has both answers and patterns for others to agree to and to follow.

Let us examine more closely this blind spot that Platt has admitted to having and use it to illustrate how he remains in need of a second healing touch so that he may see *everything* clearly. And let us also be very clear – Platt is also to be highly commended here. He hungers for Christ, has made tremendous headway in his spiritual journey (if we were to use the unwise comparison of ourselves to ourselves – 2 Cor. 10:12), he admits to having blind spots and he actually *struggles* to see his blind spots in the present. There are many who are not so diligent, zealous or eager and when their blind spots are brought into the light, most often, these will seek to hide their sin under the cover of darkness (see Jn. 3:20), returning to their comforts, remaining in their emotional or spiritual immaturities, relying on denial to keep them “blissfully ignorant,” whatever strategy is required to keep self, with its subtle ways of surviving, enthroned.

The above quote on blind spots is amplified by the example of American Christians justifying, promoting and practicing what almost all of us now clearly recognize as the sin of slavery. Platt goes so far as to say, “Good intentions, regular worship, and even study of the Bible do not prevent blindness in us.” (p. 108) Platt has yet to see that these things, especially when accompanied with unchecked or unrecognized hypocrisy, may be *the very cause* of spiritual blindness – but let us praise God that Platt has at least come to the recognition that God has indeed uncovered a blind spot in his life and brought him to a place of confession regarding this “area of disobedience” in which he “had lived as if it did not exist.” (p. 108)

The above quote regarding blind spots is Platt’s opening lines in a chapter entitled “How Much Is Enough?” that discuss the abundant wealth that we have in this country and that makes excellent comparisons to the economic living conditions of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world. Again, Platt is to be commended. There are many who are still ignorant of this vast discrepancy, some of who through willful denial *keep* themselves ignorant of at least the significance of these facts. There are “pastors” who have experienced many of the same heart-wrenching experiences as Platt depicts (p. 4-5, etc.) and who have no qualms or problems with returning to their comfortable routines and luxuriant lifestyles. Platt can at least admit, “The reality is that most everything in our lives in the American culture would be classified as a luxury, not a necessity.” (p. 127) And it is obvious that he cannot remain blindly content knowing what he knows and having experienced what he has experienced. Commendable indeed – but not completed.

In this chapter Platt uses the example of John Wesley (1703-1791) who had just bought some pictures for his room but is deeply convicted of his selfishness when he discovers that one of his cleaning maids had no winter coat and he had no money left to buy her one. It is what Platt says next that shows most clearly he is still in need of the second touch. He says, “Now we need to be careful not to misconstrue this illustration. The point is not that every picture on the

wall in your house or my house is evil. (For the record, there are pictures on the wall in my house!)” (p. 126-127)

For the record, every picture hanging on any wall, for which we have paid hundreds of dollars or more, *does* stand against the food that did not go to the starving poor (of which many are our brothers and sisters in Christ) and against the provision which did not go toward furthering the kingdom of God and impacting the nations for Christ. We, as followers of Christ, cannot serve God by using our wealth overseas while we simultaneously use our wealth in our home environment to comfort, pamper or appease our flesh. (Mt. 6:24, Gal. 5:17) We must purpose – and reinforce that purpose with every daily choice we make – to serve God and Him only or we are really our own “God” practicing whatever is right in our own eyes. (see Jdgs. 21:25)

If we were to better state the whole truth, we would say that *any* luxury purchased to indulge *any* area of our flesh that causes *any* kind of loss or inadequacy for others of God’s people, it is sin – sin that is to be repented of and forsaken. Platt mentions the classic fallacy of American “church” when he notes that the people he leads spend thousands of dollars every week after “worship” on lunch (p. 115) – if the money from just one of these gluttonous outings alone were given to some gospel workers they would be sustained for a year or more. But the point that this is sin for which the remedy is repentance – and not rationalization – is lost when Platt simply refers to every luxury as being “not evil.” Paul was “convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself” (Rom. 14:14), yet he also wrote, “Everything is permissible for me – but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible for me – but I will not be mastered by anything... Everything is permissible – but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible – but not everything is constructive.” (1 Cor. 6:12, 10:23) Those who build in the name of the Lord with wood, hay and stubble will one day see their works burned up and they will suffer loss but those who actually defile God’s temple (us, His people) with their works will be destroyed by God. (1 Cor. 3:12-17) These depths are untouched in Platt’s assurances that luxuries aren’t “evil.” Unrecognized is the truth that our luxuries are not beneficial to our poor brothers and sisters in need, they do not build the real kingdom of Christ and God in any way and they do master (enslave) those who are not wary of the deceitfulness of wealth. (also see Mt. 13:22, 1 Tim. 6:9-10)

Platt then goes on to further expose the untouched depths of this blind spot by saying, “The point is also not that we need to feel guilty whenever we purchase anything that is not an absolute necessity.” (p. 127) The reality – regardless of how we *feel* - is that we *are* guilty of indulging in luxuries while our brothers and sisters and their children die of want and need. Historically, this is the reason many have felt compelled to take vows of poverty to express their solidarity with both the Savior and the least (poorest) of His brothers. Let the wealthy ridicule, disdain and dismiss these “extremists” at their own risk!

Guilt is never a question of feeling – few convicted felons *feel* guilty even though they are – guilt is always a question of *fact* Indeed, one should not wallow in or succumb to despair or indulge in self-flagellation. Rather one should simply recognize one’s sin (refusal to submit to Christ’s lordship, if nothing else) and confess it. (1 Jn. 1:9, etc.) Sin and deception are exactly what Christ came to destroy and eradicate by bringing forgiveness and power (grace) to overcome. (1 Jn. 3:8, 5:4, etc.) So we should never allow self to pamper itself with luxuries and then justify these luxuries by obscuring the real issue (sin, selfishness, lawlessness, etc.) with talk of “feeling guilty” about our purchases. Sin is to be repented of and forsaken (Jn. 8:11) and the flesh nature that drives self is to be put to death. (Col. 3:5) This is the Biblical solution to the

factual question of guilt. Dragging in the emotions associated with guilt is only the smoke screen that hides the sin and conceals the further hidden depths of this blind spot. It is still true that few indeed recognize just how deep this “rabbit hole” goes. Platt has done well in at least recognizing that he’s stuck in a “rabbit hole” but he has not fully grasped the depths.

Platt freely confesses, “I don’t want to be blind to these things in my own life. And I don’t want to leave Christ behind... Ultimately, I don’t want to miss eternal treasure because I settle for earthly trinkets.” (p. 138) Even Platt, who desires to pursue Christ, has failed to recognize the hidden subtle grasp can still have on those who are called to be pilgrims in this world. (1 Pet. 2:11) Platt clearly says the right words: “Jesus never intended to be one voice among many counseling us on how to lead our lives and use our money. He always intends to be *the* voice that guides whatever decisions we make in our lives and with our money.” (p. 121, emphasis in original) But, according to Platt, buying pictures (or other luxuries) that makes self feel comfortable at home is no reason to feel guilty. Thus Platt’s exposure of American materialism comes up lame in one foot.

Jesus *is* to be the **only** voice we obey – self, driven by the flesh nature, does not get to decide how much is a “modest level of income” or which luxuries are acceptable and which are not. Only Christ can determine this – any other method only re-enthrones self and the light will show our fruit for what it is. We are called to liberty in all things but fleshly indulgence must never be confused with laying up treasures in heaven. (Gal. 5:13, Mt. 6:19-20)

Indeed this tiny spot of light has been illuminated by Him who is the light of the world (Jn. 9:5) but the tiny spot of floor illuminated in Platt’s “room” barely begins to scratch the surface of the whole counsel of God.

The Corner of the Room

Why have we belabored this seemingly minor point? To illustrate the nature of blind spots, especially for those who are inclined to think they have none, and to show that even when we are led by God to recognize a blind spot, we are not necessarily ensured of having grasped the whole counsel of God on the matter. Having so thoroughly dissected Platt’s recognized blind spot, we now stand in a position to analyze the blind spot he has only just begun to touch upon – the “church” paradigm.

The subtle strand of a blind spot toward luxuries pales when we find out what this man is – he is “pastor” of a mega-“church.” Remember how he struggles in the present to see his blind spots? Repeatedly throughout the book, this glaring contradiction surfaces.

Platt even says,

“I am much like the rich man [who avoided and neglected Lazarus in Jesus’ parable in Luke 16], and the church I lead looks a lot like him too. Every Sunday we gather in a multimillion-dollar building with millions of dollars in vehicles parked outside. We leave worship to spend thousands of dollars on lunch before returning to hundreds of millions of dollars worth of homes. We live in luxury.” (p. 115)

Yet this timeless “church” tradition goes on, probably unchanged, even though Platt’s blind spot has been exposed. How many gospel workers remain in poverty while this opulence is practiced in Christ’s name? We can be absolutely certain that God knows the answer to that question!

Later in the book Platt makes absolutely wonderful comparisons of the American “church,” questioning whether it has become a troop carrier or a luxury liner. (p. 169-171) He even says,

“This makes me wonder what would happen if...we decided it was time to move this ship into battle instead of sitting back on the pool deck while we wait for the staff to serve us more hors d’oeuvre.” (p. 171)

But *he* is the man who is the chief lifeguard over the pool (the multimillion dollar facility) and *he* is the man who is the head water who routinely serves up hors d’oeuvre!

Speaking of the statistical excesses of the American “church,” particularly in its buildings, Platt writes,

“My heart aches even as I write this, because the reality is that I preach every Sunday in one of these giant buildings. How do we even begin to reverse the trends regarding where we spend our resources? I constantly wrestle with this question and I don’t believe it’s a question for just pastors and church building committees.” (p. 119)

How do we begin to reverse the trends? Platt has already begun to reverse the trend – he began by modeling his life and service to God more after “the Guy who spent the majority of His ministry time with twelve men...Jesus Christ,” the Man who “was known for turning away thousands of people” (p. 2), the Man who “would intentionally shun titles, labels, plaudits, and popularity.” (p. 88) Platt clearly believes and loudly proclaims, “Regardless of what country you live in, what skills we possess, what kind of education we have, or what kind of salary we make, Jesus has commanded each of us to make disciples, and *this is the means* by which we will impact the world.” (p. 86-87, emphasis in original) Platt has even taken further steps to put this into practice. He writes,

“For a time we were trying to organize and centralize all the various types of community ministries we were involved in. The problem, however, was that the more we encouraged and equipped people to go and make disciples of all nations, the harder it was to try to control all that they were doing. That’s when we sat back and realized that the last thing we needed to do was to control everything that everyone was doing! So we decentralized all these ministries and instead focused on empowering men and women to start, manage and lead ministries all across our city.” (p. 199)

As good as all this may be (there are caveats to these statements we will explore in a moment) – as good as asking “How do we begin to reverse the trends?” may be, the real questions remain, as Platt says,

“*[Am] I going to believe Jesus? [Am] I going to embrace Jesus even though He [says] radical things that [drive] the crowds away? ...[Am] I going to obey Jesus?*” Hear carefully “Pastor” Platt’s words that immediately follow these important questions: “My biggest fear, even now, is that I will hear Jesus’ words

and walk away, content to settle for less than radical obedience to Him. In other words, my biggest fear is that I will do exactly what most people did when they encountered Jesus in the first century.” (p. 3, emphasis in original)

The New Testament is replete with instructions to be diligent to *persevere to the end*. (Mt. 24:13, Heb. 6:11-12, 2 Pet. 1:5-7, etc.) It is not enough to *begin* to reverse these trends – we must *complete* the process by which we turn from self and worldliness and turn wholly to Christ and God. Thus, we must question why “Pastor” Platt, who every week gathers thousands of people to sit at his feet, could possibly believe that he is completely modeling his ministry after the Man who chased thousands away and why “Pastor” Platt could possibly think he is being like the Man who shunned titles, labels, plaudits and popularity while Platt retains his share of these things. We must question how much control of the various ministries around the city was actually relinquished if all the money (the “tithes” and “offerings”) are still given to the central “church” and if only those “leaders” who meet with the approval of the “Pastor” and/or the “church” oversight committee and who will reproduce and maintain the central “church’s” philosophies and standards, are those who actually receive support and encouragement. Perhaps Platt’s “church” and its committees do ask the only right question – what does Jesus want us do with all this wealth? – but there are many “churches,” especially mega-“churches,” that would ridicule such “simplicity.”

How is Platt and any others truly serving Christ under similar conditions to *complete* this reversal they have begun? The answer is to fully follow the processes they have begun – *fully* model one’s service to God after the example of Christ and even more importantly follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in all things, *fully* decentralize because the body of Christ already has a Head who leads by His Holy Spirit. Stop taking the people’s money and push them to be completely dependent upon the Lord as to where, when, how much and to whom to give. Stop providing a place where people can be passive listeners fulfilling the “pastor’s” hidden agendas to be significant and important. Stop providing a place where carnal people can hide in the crowd and pretend to be or deceive themselves into believing themselves to be followers of Christ because no one really knows them. Even Platt, though he claims to “pastor” and lead his “church,” recognizes this. “As a pastor, I shudder at the thought and lie awake at night when I consider the possibility that scores of people who sit before me on a Sunday morning might think they are saved when they are not.” (p. 38) But “Pastor” Platt (and all the other mega-“church” “pastors”) is the man who is the circus ringmaster at what Tozer called the religious squirrel cages, the man calling out to the crowd what each endlessly spinning hamster wheel is for.

For those who have come out of the “church” (not out of Christ’s body or ekklesia or temple or house or family – just away from all the “Christian” idolaters just as Scripture commands us – 2 Cor. 6:17, 1 Cor. 5:11, Rev. 18:4), the solution to Platt’s dilemma with which he wrestles is a no-brainer. “Pastor” Platt, stop taking the preeminence, stop making followers after yourself (as good as that may be in comparison to other “churches”) and tear down the building and use the materials to build useful buildings like orphanages or inner-city hydroponic gardens. As Reagan said to Gorbachev about the Berlin wall, “That monstrosity needs to go – tear it down!” Or in the example of the Israelites under Hezekiah – tear down the high places! (2 Chr. 31:1)

But otherwise we can know with certainty that the religious squirrel cages will continue to rob other members of Christ’s body of their daily bread and the endlessly rolling hamster wheels will continue to burn out those who in reality serve and obey their own hidden “ideas,

values, and assumptions that contradict what God has said in His Word” (p. 215) and not Christ. When Christ confirms His call to surrender all, to come out, be separate and forsake being “pastor” of a mega-“church” so as to truly be a shepherd of God’s flock, will the titles, the prestige, the preeminence, the power, the affluence that allows Platt to trot around the globe, will these things cause “Pastor” Platt’s deepest fear – that he could turn away from Christ – be realized?

An Unfinished Work

Jesus said to the ekklesia of Sardis, “I know your deeds and you; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of My God.” (Rev. 3:1-2) This is a good summary of what God is saying to His people who are still ensnared in the institutional and American “church” and is certainly applicable to Platt and those practicing and propagating the American and “church” “gospel.” God is not going to resurrect or build up these things that are in reality death and deception – instead He will, as He has always done, quietly build up His kingdom and His people, often in spite of what men say and do in His name. Jesus’ promise that “I will build My ekklesia” (Mt. 16:18) was not accompanied by any ideas that men could do anything other than co-labor with Him and it was accompanied with a promise that the gates of Hell, the schemes and prison traps that hold men captive to false ideas, could not prevail against His work.

It is difficult to criticize this book too sharply because the author has received so many insights from the Lord and has so many truths in better perspective than many, perhaps even most, Americans and what faults the book has are intricately wrapped up in the demonically clever scheme of the “church” paradigm. Nor is it possible, in the scope of one review, to correct all the errors that attend anyone who sees nothing wrong with being a “pastor” of a mega-“church.” But if Platt had simply received these insights and waited for the Lord to give him a fuller understanding, he would have written a book that would have been more rightly divided. As it now stands, Platt has written a book to wealthy Americans (the poor would neither be able to buy his book and they have no way to apply or participate in what he writes about) that gives them justification to keep their wealth, their unbiblical “church” structure and extravagant and luxurious buildings and still believe they are experiencing God too. As much as Platt has right, what he has wrong will prove damaging or even fatal in the end. Already in place is his read-made form to participate in his one-year experiment (whether that is really God’s will for every person or not). Platt’s book, if successful, will serve more to spread the American “gospel” and the “church” paradigm than it will take the real Jesus to foreign lands.

Come out and be separate – different. Live for Him – only. Jettison the “church” paradigm – entirely. Purify yourselves from *all* that contaminates body, soul and spirit. (see 2 Cor. 7:1)

Radical is simply not radical enough. May Platt’s journey toward and into more of Christ continue and may Platt (and those like or behind him) always respond in obedience to all of Christ’s radical commands. And may we all face all our blind spots (which Platt is absolutely correct – we *all* have them!) courageously, never fearing to have any or all parts of our lives thrust into the light of Christ’s truths. Anything else is mere “church,” a counterfeit of the real thing, that may yet result in our dismissal from His presence on the day of judgment. (Mt. 7:21-23)

At the end of Jesus’ teaching of the parables of the kingdom, He asked them, “Have you understood these things?” Whether they truly did or not, they replied, “Yes,” (Mt. 13:51) When

the blind man received his second healing touch and he could see everything in clear focus, Jesus did not send him to impact the nations – instead, “Jesus sent him *home* saying, ‘Don’t go and tell anyone in the village.’” (Mk. 8:26) Platt is so focused on making disciples (newborn converts) of all nations, that he fails to leave room for those whom God would raise up to mature and purify those disciples who have been converted as well as those who have been contaminated by the errors of the men they have listened to and been disciplined by. Christ knows whom to send and when to send them if we would but listen to Him and learn to co-labor with Him rather than think we need to go and do something *for* Him. Platt’s gospel, as good as it seems to those wealthy people trying to get out of their pews at least once in a while, entirely overlooks that, in addition to God’s command to make disciples is His purpose that “we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Eph. 4:13) As good a step as Platt has taken in confronting his blind spots (in regards to the American dream, luxuries and wealth, his is an incomplete work in itself and whatever steps Platt will take in regard to the “church” paradigm only time will tell), no one who is truly seeking to follow the Lord wherever He is leading them should think that Platt’s book conveys the whole counsel of God on any of the issues he is discussing.

It is good that light has penetrated Platt’s room in the dungeon called “church.” It is good that Platt is at least asking some of the right questions. But this is only the beginning and obeying Christ in all things is not merely a pattern to follow nor an experiment to try for a year to see if we like it or not. It is clear that Platt’s global outreach is fueled by money (the god Mammon) and that the institutional and American “church” (as designed by the demonic spirits who promote false religion and who seek to displace Christ in subtle ways) are well represented in Platt’s ideas of “church” and “gospel.” Let the sincere follower of Christ be wary of the subtle traps – and there are others not addressed in this analysis – contained within the book that ultimately calls one to a limited radical response to the One who gives us all of Himself. Christ bought all of us – that is, every bit of what we are – with His own blood (1 Cor. 6:20) – it is only right and fitting that we no longer live for ourselves but rather we should live and die only for Him who died for us. (2 Cor. 5:15) Platt’s call is to a radical American and institutional “Christianity” (in which one with genuine faith and hunger for righteousness can still find and be introduced to the real Christ Jesus - as is true of any and all deceptive variations of churchianity that preach anything resembling the truth) but it is not truly a call to a radical *biblical* Christianity. It is a first step but it is simply not radical enough to be the whole counsel of God nor the original and only way of following Christ and God.

No matter what kind of “church” we find ourselves involved in, we really need to first come out of the dungeon of darkness and truly live in Christ’s bright light before we begin to think we have any answers that others need for life and godliness. To teach ones questions and limited observations as answers is deception of the highest order. “Have *nothing* to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.” (Eph. 5:11) Considering that all of us are born into darkness and live all our lives in darkness, this is the truly radical *biblical* Christianity Christ calls us to.

Let he who has ears hear.

Neil Girrard
Paidion Books
P.O. Box 327
Capitan, NM 88316

Website – www.paidionbooks.org

Email – paidion@paidionbooks.org

This article - <http://paidionbooks.org/girard/reviews/bswhwm.html>