

# Christian Witness in the Marketplace

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# Introduction

- Biblical Christianity is not lived within the four walls of the church
- What is the Christian's place in society?
- What is this amorphous locale that we call the marketplace?
- How do we build bridges to religious and ethnic others?

# Defining Marketplace

- The modern idea of the marketplace traces back to the *agora* of ancient Greece (e.g., Acts 17)
- It cannot be reduced to a place solely for trade and commerce
- It is an arena in which a confluence of human activities take place—politics, education, government, law, and trade
- Christians should know that the modern marketplace is not ideologically or morally neutral
- It is influenced by worldviews such as naturalism, individualism, and relativism

# Defining Marketplace

- The ancient *agora*, such as Athens, was also the home of temples dedicated to different gods
- Thus, the modern marketplace is captivated by all manners of idolatry, which are antithetical to Christianity
- Paul describes these entities as “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2) and the god of this world (2 Cor 4:4)
- Their single purpose is to blind minds and hearts from the Creator God

# Cultural Engagement

- Israel was exiled to Babylon for 70 years
- The exile was a punishment and banishment from their own land because of sin
- They may think just to sit there and wait it out for 70 years
- No, God instructed them to seek the “shalom” in Babylon
- What were they supposed to do?
- Build houses, settle down, plant gardens, marry and have children and increase in numbers
- How should Singaporeans seek the “shalom” of this land?

# Cultural Engagement

- Biblical warrants for cultural engagement:
- “This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: <sup>5</sup>“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. <sup>6</sup>Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. <sup>7</sup>Also, seek the peace and prosperity (**shalom**) of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (Jer 29:4-7)

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# Cultural Engagement

- Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. <sup>12</sup> Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.
- <sup>13</sup> Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, <sup>14</sup> or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. <sup>15</sup> For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. <sup>16</sup> Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. <sup>17</sup> Show proper **respect** to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, **honor** the emperor (1 Pt 2:11-17)

# Position as Citizens in Exile

- What does it mean to be citizens in exile?
- As **citizens**, we have our rights and obligations
- It means we are committed to the city and the land
- We speak up with conviction on matters of the city
- As Christians, we should not feel compelled to be a-religious in the public square
- **Exiles** are only living temporarily in the land; they may be there by force or due to difficult circumstances

# Position as Citizens in Exile

- Christians live in tension as citizens and exiles
- We live in the land and do what we can to reflect the “shalom” plan of God
- Yet we set our eyes on the eternity city of God—Jerusalem which will come down from heaven
- 1 Pt 1:1 says: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God’s elect, **exiles** scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,”
- Why? Because we are citizens of heaven

# Position as Citizens in Exile

- Clearly, from 1 Pt 2:11-12, Christians are not to be separatists
- We are to be involved in community
- The good life entails submitting to government
- “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, <sup>14</sup> or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. <sup>15</sup> For it is God’s will that by **doing good** you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. <sup>16</sup> Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God’s slaves. <sup>17</sup> Show proper **respect** to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, **honor** the emperor” (1 Pt 2:13-17)

# Position as Citizens in Exile

- Although Christians are exiles (aliens), that does not mean separatism
- What is “good” in our community?
- Whose good are we looking for?
- We are concerned not only about our own welfare but the welfare of others as well
- As Christians, we must not be partisan in our interests
- Our position is both as citizens and exiles. This is our identity

# Common Grace

- For in this public space we call the marketplace, a greater power is at work—that of the almighty God, whose nature is love
- The Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof calls this “common grace,” a grace given by God which is applied to all humans in general
- The role of Christians in the marketplace—whatever his/her vocation—is to point others to the Creator God through word and deed
- To do this, we must incarnate Jesus to an unbelieving world

# Proclamation as Citizens in Exile

- What is our message? How should we convey that message?
- In word and deed (Matt 5:13-16):
- “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. <sup>14</sup> “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your **good deeds** and glorify your Father in heaven”

# Proclamation as Citizens in Exile

- Singaporeans are in the forefront of providing social services
- What is our motivation for doing so?
- There is the perception among non-believers that Christians who do social work have a hidden agenda—to expand the church
- Our motivation is love and conversion may be a fruit of that work
- “A new command I give you: **Love one another**. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (Jn 13:34-35)

# Proclamation as Citizens in Exile

- Singaporeans often say that we shouldn't send our kids to church kindergarten because Christians will try to convert them
- We should try to shake off that perception
- As Christians, our message is the Bible and we have a Christian worldview
- We need to use language that others can understand even when they don't share our convictions and values
- We can appeal to broad principles that everyone can agree with like justice, compassion, and graciousness
- “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8)
- We must do good to others and consider the welfare of society