

Adam's original sin led to the fallen state of humanity. Cain added a secondary curse with his fratricide and subsequent cover-up and hypocrisy ("I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" Gen 4:9). Cain even claimed that the punishment was too hard for his crime (v.13) – that the ground would not yield to him according to its (previous) strength, and that thus humankind would become fugitives and wanderers on the earth. Noah was called to alleviate the toil – his name is based on the root of the word "to comfort", and he fulfilled his purpose in his own way, bringing about a new state for humanity, in which it would consume meat for the first time (Gen 9:1-5).

The Almighty is neither cruel nor cynical. He is displeased with most things happening with His quite fully depraved humanity. Our Father in heaven does not want to stop loving us, and He made a covenant between Him and us to not again clean the slate of the earth with floodwaters. In Gen 8:21, He says that He will "never again curse the ground". It is a somewhat lopsided covenant, with nothing on the side of the fallen humanity to abide by. He would have known that any conditionality would have been sooner or later broken, mandating the return of floodwaters. So he could only swear by Himself that he would never again destroy all flesh, come what may. But is the former curse lifted, as the old ground was washed in the flood?

Whichever way we understand this, we need to realise that we are on hostile ground, in a hostile age (Eph 5:16). This applies to all occupation. The earth in its current state is generally not geared for pleasant labour to satisfy a human's needs. Sustainable cultivation practices like permaculture or agroforestry are the exception, abuse and degrading exploitation of the land are, regrettably, currently the norm. Spiralling greed leads to ever greater devastation without voices of reason able to turn the ship around. Excessive wealth is obtained through obedience to and worship of mammon. Satan is the Lord of this age (Mt 4:8-9, 2 Cor 4:4, 1 John 5:19). So if we go with the default, do as we see fit in our fallen state, we will go down the broad path to destruction. Topsoil erosion and consequential fertility loss is the most alarming sign of our times, right now still glossed over by the application of large quantities of mineral fertiliser produced using fossil resources and industrial farming practices, both based mainly on non-renewable (fossil) energy.

The ground is the base of all life. Adam is made from and of the ha'adama. During the brief energy boost caused by tapping into an extra energy source under the ground has brought about a massive growth and development spurt of the human species, and alongside, a detachment from the soil, the ground as the primary interface of our existence.

Yes natural resources are theoretically abundant, the earth as an open radiant energy system is what the physicists an "uncritical": it receives more, in fact vastly more energy from the sun than it needs to sustain life. Cornucopians miss the point though: this abundance is not at our disposal, because any fallen human in possession of the means to gain material wealth will invariably and usually successfully be tempted to use this wealth for their own luxurious lifestyles rather than the benefit of society.

How then can and should we gain a living who earnestly seek the Creator's ways and paths, who yearn to be directed by the Almighty in His wisdom? As we are in this evil age, do we have to partake in breadwinning through exploitation of nature, including animals, and other humans? We are called to shine like stars among a crooked and depraved generation (Phil 2:15). We are also to obey our human rulers (1 Peter 2:13) and remain in our state (1 Cor 7:20). This latter verse has various interpretations. It may well refer to circumcision, as some Gentile believers opted to fulfil the law by getting circumcised. Paul here then argues that no other step is necessary for admission into the chosen saints than the calling of faith. (The word "calling", κλήσει, sometimes translated "situation" can mean a spiritual call or secular occupation.)

Others think Paul may have written this instruction in expectation of Christ's soon return, so that he considered uprisings and revolts a waste of time. Or the budding church may be in no position to take on large-scale social injustices, making the point that we are all free in Christ, and that we are all slaves to the world, whatever state or position we are in with regard to the current age, i.e. whether we are, in a secular sense, "free" or "slaves".

If redeemed, we are not toiling as slaves for the Lord. In Romans 4:4, Paul explains that if we expect a reward for our labour, we are misguided. We are voluntarily spreading the good news and loving people as we have been loved first, based on the reward that we already been freely given: redemption from our slavery to sin and misery.

## Summary

We are all subordinated to the depravity of the fallen world, redeemed or unredeemed. The difference is that the redeemed look forward to a renewal, while most unredeemed either take a glum view of the planet's future, or believe that the salvation of the same rests on their shoulders. But this world is fallen through rebellion against God's perfect institutions, and it is also seeped through with Abel's innocent blood. We are on cursed soil. Whoever deems him or herself grazing green pastures is lulled in a sense of ignorant bliss.

True beauty and restoration of all things is yet to come. It will not happen overnight, it will take the millennium to bring the world back into shape, worthy to be handed back to its Creator after it temporarily had to be used as a demonstration object and a battlefield, in order to teach humanity exactly all the lessons it had to get into, down and through. This is how even this wicked age is part of the Almighty's perfect plan for humanity: it is necessary. For dawning needs a lot to us stubborn creatures, and digesting takes its time, as does the resulting transformation.

Meanwhile, we plough on through unyielding, embittered earth that is mangled and mingled with the salt of drained innocent lifeblood and the tears it weeps, in unity with its Creator, about it.

## Application

So on a practical level, how can we partake without condoning? Being a good influence without being overly judgemental?

To me it means pursuing occupation that at least attempts to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem, which would correlate to the social, charitable or sustainability sectors.

Secondly, it means focussing on the lord's mission (Mt 28:19, Acts 1:8) and use every opportunity that opens up to evangelise, through deed (first) and word (possibly later).

It also means spanning the rift between having peace about where the Lord put me and what I am doing, and taking steps in faith to change my circumstances if I sense myself called out; both instead of judging myself as useless or out of place. Every place I dwell in is purposed and preordained by the Father – so I can say in retrospect. Looking ahead, of course I will want to hear His will and go where He directs.

Abraham had to wait to the age of 100 until the rightful heir was born to him, against all odds and practical concerns. Abraham had been impatient and influenced against his trust and faith to beget Ishmael aged 86. It is still the Lord's time, so rushing things even while the days are short to His second coming would be imprudent and ultimately, selfish.