

AS BELIEVERS HERE WE MUST LIVE

It Is All To Be Expected As Fallen Sinners.

It is one of the purposes of God in Genesis Chapter Three to tell us once and for all that all our aspirations, philosophical, religious, political, scientific and personal are futile, that there is no way we can run away from the consequences of our sin natures and the fall. We cannot go back to a pleasant childhood; we cannot return to teenage adolescence with loads of 'relationships' to find joy. We cannot by bidding farewell to technology recreate some sort of paradise for mankind.

We have to stand up and look steadily at the bleakness of the closing verses of Genesis Chapter Three. There we find that God has laid down for us irreversibly the everlasting conditions for mankind. Here is the absolutely unchanging framework for human lives. What is it? We have to live our lives outside the Garden of Eden. We have been expelled from that place and there is absolutely nothing we can do to get back there. There is no way we can avoid that loss. Men must live their lives under the anathema of God. We have to live with the obligation of laboring and toiling in the sweat of our brows, facing an unavoidable death. Dust we are and to the dust we shall return. We have to live lives subject to individual harassment and temptation, with all kinds of domestic upset, bitterness and the frequent frustrations of personal relationships. God has said that it will be in sorrow we shall bring forth children, and in sorrow we will rear and raise and educate families and there is no way that this can be undone.

Even as we toil and perspire with the problems of our own domestic situation then time and again our environment is going to beat us. The sea defenses will not hold up; the hurricanes will come rolling in; the tsunamis will slash through the coastal towns; the rivers will overflow; the earthquakes will shake whole communities to pieces, the volcanoes will erupt, the floods will breach the dykes, the asteroids will strike the earth, the fossil fuels are one day going to run out, and a hard rain is going to fall. I wish we could reconcile ourselves to that and get rid of every idea of some sort of calm earthly existence. There is no possibility of utopia. We will never reestablish paradise on this earth. We have no right today to plead before God for a life free from the condition of the anathema and the curse. It lies heavily and immovably on human life, on individual life and upon nations, and there is no way any of us anywhere is going to escape from the consequences of the fall nor should we want to.

What we must say to ourselves is this; "This is the day God made. It is a great gift, the vast groaning world, this sad little town with all its pain and strife and sin. Like every part of God's earth, in every hemisphere and continent, it is all under the anathema, struggling and sweating and gasping under the ordinances of toil and tears and childbirth. We read our local weekly paper and we discover fallenness, divorce, strife, theft, disorder, fire, calamity, pain, violence, ugliness, pollution, disease and the grave. Then we say to ourselves, "it is the day God made."

Much more than that, it is in this environment that God pleads with sinners to turn to Him. You go back to the New Testament and you never find anywhere a command

saying, "Serve God and witness to the world when circumstances are improved." Do we imagine to ourselves that if only there'd be some kind of revival, or awakening that that would remove all the dimensions of the anathema out of the situation? That then there would be no more disease, and no more death?

I say that God tells us to bear witness to Jesus Christ in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation; that is where we live our lives as Christians. We are to live godly and soberly and righteously in this present evil world, just there! Amidst human life with its sins and sorrows, that is where we are to live, and let's not imagine that there are other kinds of ages and places where men did or yet will find it easier to present their bodies a living sacrifice to God. It was not easier in the 18th century when Daniel Rowland lived. It was not easier in London in the 19th century when Spurgeon was preaching there. It was not easier in Wales at the beginning of the 20th century when there was a famous revival. We today have to steel ourselves and say to this horrible 21st century, "I am going to live for God in you."

It seems to me that there are real and terrible perils facing us, that we are on the run from urbanization, that is, we are on the run from city life, and above all that the whole of evangelical Christianity in America is on the run from the 21st century as if searching for some restful backwater in which to live for God and then it would really enjoy knowing and serving him. But God wants us to redeem a sinful civilization and a dying world and we are to live in it as its salt and light and witness in it in order for its redemption. And if we find ourselves today with all kinds of problems and tensions because of our environment then let's please say to ourselves, "It is all to be expected as fallen sinners. The road back to paradise is banned," and let us rid ourselves of our nostalgia.