

human beings. Christ earned grace for sinners by His perfect righteous life and His perfect sacrificial death; and on this basis God freely bestows His grace upon us as a gift!

And this is just as true in connection with God's general grace toward all sinners as it is with God's special grace toward some sinners. In fact, all forms and expressions of God's grace come to mankind on the basis of Christ's atoning work.

Now we must ask how God's general grace and God's special grace differ, and how each relates to the prevention and alleviation of human suffering.

A. God's Gracious Prevention and Alleviation of Some Suffering for All Human Beings

God's general grace toward all mankind takes two basic forms: God's general mercy and God's general benevolence.

God's mercy is His inclination to treat sinners with leniency, with less severity than they deserve for their sins. God's mercy also includes His inclination to extend pity to those who are miserable.

1. How God's general mercy prevents or alleviates some suffering

- a. One important way in which His general mercy has prevented suffering is by His deferment of immediate judgment and punishment of all mankind for their shared responsibility in original sin.

God in His mercy did not immediately execute the just sentence of death and everlasting destruction upon mankind, but deferred it until the Day of His righteous Judgment. He allowed human beings to live their lives and enjoy the good things He had created for His glory and their benefit.

The implications of this deferment are clear: human life is doubly a gift of God's grace. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed! Every breath and every heartbeat of every human being is a gift of God's grace that defers much suffering.

Each moment of every human being's life is a gift from the Lord Jesus Christ, so that he or she might become consciously aware of his or her obligations to know and worship God; might realize his total dependence upon God, his fallen condition, and his need of deliverance from sin and its results; might seek salvation from sin and its effects through Christ's atonement; might find meaning in life by seeking to glorify God and to do His work in the world; and might be with God and enjoy Him forever.

Of course, if human beings regard this postponement of judgment as an opportunity to do as they please, with no thought of or concern for coming doom; and if they do not use this time of deferment to seek salvation and live for God's glory; then they will