

desires for power and prestige! What corruption and violence and bloodshed would fill the earth! And what suffering!

But how does the Holy Spirit restrain sin? What means does He employ?

For one thing He restrains sin by applying to their conscience the Law of God written in men's natures, thereby approving thoughts and actions that conform to God's Law and disapproving those that are not. Thus He convicts human beings of sin and of external righteousness.

For another thing, He restrains sin by making human beings aware that they are worthy of death for their sins, and thus restrains them through fear of coming judgment.

He also restrains sin through human governments and human laws that incorporate principles of the Law of God, and through civil magistrates who punish evildoers and maintain justice and order and outward peace in society.

And He sometimes restrains sin by means of special providences, in which iniquity is punished and good deeds are rewarded in this life – thus providing motivation toward good and deterrents to evil.

By these and other means the Holy Spirit mercifully restrains human beings from fully expressing their innate depravity.

Thank God for men's consciences; for human government and laws and magistrates; for the fear of coming judgment; and for His special providences! Without them this world would be a terrible place, and would be filled with human suffering such as has never been seen in the history of mankind!

And this general mercy which restrains sins and prevents suffering comes to human beings through Christ's atoning work. Thank God for His sovereign love to sinful mankind, and for His wonderful grace in the form of His general mercy!

## 2. How God's general benevolence prevents or alleviates some suffering

God's benevolence is His inclination to promote happiness, and arises out of His essential goodness and kindness. God's general benevolence tends to promote well-being and happiness instead of suffering.

- a. One important way in which God's general benevolence tends to promote happiness instead of suffering is by His preservation of the world in which human beings are privileged to live.