
Grace That Overcomes

*"Praise the LORD! Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; for His lovingkindness is everlasting";
"Nevertheless He looked upon their distress when He heard their cry; and He remembered His covenant
for their sake, and relented according to the greatness of His lovingkindness" (Psalm 106:1, 44, 45).*

God's matchless, transforming grace is a great theme in the Scriptures, both in the New Testament and the Old. Psalm 106, for example, is a song that features a scathing rebuke of eight specific sins committed by Israel; yet, its surprising, transcending thought is that God's grace overcomes sin and overwhelms those who understand it.

Nothing in this world compares to grace. The God who was asked to redeem Israel is One who is adept at forgiveness, reclamation, and dealing with guilt! Israel, often steeped in sin, seems to have been a difficult candidate for character recovery. Only the God of all grace could meet the needs exhibited by such a rebellious nation.

The writer of Psalm 106 presented one of the brightest and most hopeful pictures of God's enduring mercy in the fewest number of words. Interlaced in the litany of Israel's failures in this text are several attributes of God's saving nature.

In light of what the psalmist was praying here, how then should we view God's grace?

First, we must see His grace as overarching. If permitted, His grace can overcome any sin. The list of sins given in the psalm would be difficult to exceed: Distrust, idolatry, immorality, impatience, child sacrifice, and rebellion are included. How sordid, disgusting, and revealing the enumeration is! Can God forgive such sins? If He could forgive these, then He can work wonders in the life of any penitent sinner who comes to Him.

Second, it is essential that we see His grace as conditional. It is strong enough for any difficulty; however, for His grace to overcome

our failures, it must always be coupled with repentance. God cannot save us without our cooperation. Salvation is "by grace through faith" (see Ephesians 2:8, 9).

When the nation of Israel saw their need, when they cried to God for mercy, "He remembered His covenant for their sake, and relented according to the greatness of His lovingkindness" (Psalm 106:45). When God's people went into sin, they fell from His grace and found themselves under His strong hand of judgment. When they returned to Him in penitence and obedience, He extended to them His tender hand of forgiveness and fellowship. We read, "*Many times He would deliver them; they, however, were rebellious in their counsel, and so sank down in their iniquity*" (Psalm 106:43; emphasis mine). As we rejoice over the "many times," we cannot forget the "however's." We must never take for granted the Lord's grace and fall back into sin.

Third, we are to see His grace as having a divine purpose. Connected to the pivotal word "nevertheless" is a reference to the purpose of His grace: "Nevertheless He saved them for the sake of His name, that He might make His power known" (Psalm 106:8).

God does not pardon us just because of His desire to pardon sinners. He is redeeming a people to be His people. He has saved us so that we might sing His praises and serve Him as part of His eternal purpose. The psalmist wrote, "Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the nations, to give thanks to Your holy name and glory in Your praise" (Psalm 106:47). Paul said,

Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:4-6).

Fourth, it is encouraging to remember that His grace is ever-present. It is eternal and has an unfathomable depth. His grace arises from His eternal existence. It is stable, continual, and infinite. The cornerstone truth regarding His grace is the fact that "His lovingkindness is everlasting" (Psalm 106:1c). The KJV says, "His mercy endureth for ever." What He was yesterday, He is today; what He is today, He will be tomorrow (Hebrews 13:8). He is not only ever ready to help us, but He is also ever-present in His lovingkindness to forgive us. Paul said, "Though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist" (Acts 17:27c, 28a). Our physical lives are in His hands, and our spiritual lives are in His heart of grace.

Therefore, His grace is wonderfully available to us. When we cry, He responds. "Nevertheless He looked upon their distress when He heard their cry; and He remembered His covenant for their sake, and relented according to the greatness of His lovingkindness" (Psalm 106:44, 45). Jesus said, "And the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37b).

Israel knew that God would receive and forgive anyone who would come to Him with a penitent and contrite heart. He is the same today. As the eternal One, God lives above time and promises to save us here and now and in eternity. Lovingkindness was part of His covenant. He had promised to be merciful and redemptive to His people. He was gracious, is gracious, and ever will be gracious.

The Israelites provide an example to Chris-

tians, of what not to do:

Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play." Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come (1 Corinthians 10:6-11).

Paul's use of these examples sounds a warning about falling away from God's grace. At the end of his list is an exhortation: "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). Psalm 106, with its lists of Israel's sins, however, has a different emphasis entirely, calling the reader to rejoice in God's mercy (v. 1). It says, in effect, "If God can reclaim and sustain Israel, if He can cleanse and heal this sinful nation, restoring it through His grace, He can save anyone who is willing to become obedient."

God's grace is granted only on the condition of penitence; but its coverage is complete, and its spiritual consequences are everlasting. As we contemplate the disposition and behavior of divine grace, its character should inspire us all to say with the writer of the psalm, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting even to everlasting" (v. 48a).

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"And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death" (Revelation 12:11).