

“To the Praise of the Glory of His Grace”
Against All Odds – God’s Conquering Grace
Marvin Mounthey

1 Thess. 1:4-6
(Outline)

1. Introduction

What is the issue suggested by the title ‘Against All Odds’?

- -that a child of darkness would become a child of light
- -that a lover of sin would become a lover of holiness
- -that a child of the devil should become a child of God

2. Is every person in the world as bad or evil as they possibly can be?

No — not all are atheists.

- -many are very moral
- -many are fervently religious
- -being fervently religious and moral does not equal acceptance with God.

3. There are other obstacles to true faith in Christ and holy living.

- -the pleasures of sin
- -living only for this world
- -living in unbelief is popular
- -false faith
- -Pharaoh as an example of temporary but false faith

4. Is saving faith part of man’s natural abilities and powers?

- Steven’s testimony in Acts 7:51
- The testimony of Roman 3:10ff

5. How does anyone become a lover of God—a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ—and obedient to the word of God?

6. It takes a work of God — a miracle to be a Christian — Jn.6:44.

- Remember the rich young ruler Lk.18:18
- Salvation not under our power but God's

7. Grace must be exalted with a legitimate right to reign.

- The reign of grace Rom.5:21
- Grace does not just make it possible to be saved — it saves!

8. Who are the people who respond to the gospel in saving faith?

- Lydia in Acts 16:14
- Parable of the Sower

9. The effectual power of grace demonstrated:

- In the life of the leprosy man of Lk.5:12
- In the life of the paralyzed man of Lk.5:18
- In the life of Levi. Lk.22:27

10. What are the evidences that accompany the work of Grace? 1Thess.1:4-6

- a) The gospel comes in power
- b) The gospel comes in the Holy Spirit
- c) The gospel comes with much assurance
- d) The gospel comes with joy

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Against All Odds – God’s Conquering Grace

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1 Thess. 1:4-6
(Complete Manuscript)

1. Introduction

The title of the seminar assigned to me is ‘Against All Odds—God’s Conquering Grace. And I want to use that title to ask you a few questions and get our minds thinking about this important and wonderful truth of God’s conquering grace. Against all odds already suggest that we are dealing with an issue that lies in the area of the divine and miraculous.

What is the issue? It is simply this; What are the odds that a child of Adam born in sin, a lover of sin, dead in sin would ever or could ever come to love God? What are the odds that a child of Adam could ever change the bias of his nature, which is at enmity towards God and in blind rebellion against God and become an obedient follower and lover of the Lord Jesus Christ?

What are the odds that proud self-centered children of Adam would ever or could ever humble themselves—deny themselves—witness against themselves as deserving of eternal punishment at the hands of a just and holy God?

Or again, what are the odds that a child of Adam biased against holiness and a hater of sinlessness would ever or could ever turn from sin, repent, and follow after holiness?

Well, the odds are the same as a dead man getting out of his coffin and resuming life in all its fullness.

Someone once told Charles Spurgeon, the great baptist preacher of 1800, the story of a man who had died and after having been dead for 3 days got up out of his coffin and walked 5 miles from the graveyard home. And he said to Mr. Spurgeon, “What do you think of that?” He replied it was not the 5 mile walk home that he found difficulty believing, it was the first step. What are the odds of a dead man making the first step? They are the same as the odds of a child of Adam who is a sinner by nature—of their own will—taking the first step toward God and salvation from sin.

2. Is every person in the world as bad or evil as they possibly can be?

Now does this mean that everyone in this world is as bad and evil as it is possible to be. No. There are lots of people who are not atheists. There are lots of people who are very moral who put forth a real effort at being good and doing what is right by their neighbor. There are lots of people who are spiritually minded in the sense that they believe God or life after death and a whole spiritual realm of life about us. They tell us that spiritual awareness and consciousness is at one of its all time highs.

People want to get in touch with and get comfort and strength and help from spiritual powers beyond themselves—and they are willing to pay, serve and worship for such help. False religion and false versions of Christianity are flourishing today. Mel Gibson’s film the Passion of Christ is expected to gross over 1 billion dollars. Religion still sells and it has a large following.

In fact religion, false religion, false Christianity, is one of the big obstacles that is used to keep people antagonistic to a true knowledge of God, and keeps them from coming to faith, a genuine saving faith, in the Lord Jesus Christ. Is religion not what kept Saul of Tarsus from faith in Christ, even made

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him a persecutor of Christians? You could not find a more zealous ardent religious man than Saul of Tarsus.

Look at how religion today is keeping millions from Christ in our own country by preaching a counterfeit Jesus; a Jesus who was a good moral man—a Jesus who believed in God—a Jesus who suffered and sacrifice for his faith and the good of man. This Jesus they follow as their example and even hero.

Add to that the fervent religious spirit of the Muslims and the zealous Jews! The apostle could say of the Jews in Rom.10:2 *'I bear them record that they have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge'*—and what he says about them is true of all who are religious yet do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the substitute for sinners, the world's only Savior.

He says further of the Jew, *'they being ignorant of God's righteousness and going about to establish their own righteousness have not submitted to the righteousness of God.'*

There is the great accusation—the root from which all false religion springs—man seeking to establish his own righteousness has not submitted to the righteousness of God. Man in sin wants to believe and show that he is good, even, spiritual enough, to earn the favor and blessing of God. So false religion, false versions of Christianity have a ready and willing reception in the fallen, sinful sons of Adam. That is why it flourishes and will continue to flourish.

Religion, false religion, false versions of Christianity are not the only obstacles that are used to blind men and women to the truth of the gospel of Christ and keep them in bondage to sin, but it is one of the biggest.

3. There are other obstacles to true faith in Christ and holy living.

Now there are other obstacles that are stumbling blocks that keep people from coming to faith in Christ and living a holy life. The pleasures of this world is another such obstacle. Sin can use worldly pleasures to keep people in blind unbelief. And when sin uses the pleasures of this world in that way they become the pleasures of sin.

Remember Moses? We read in Heb.11 that by faith Moses forsook the pleasures of sin for a season—he forsook the treasures of Egypt. As J.C. Ryle put it, Moses knowing, willingly, consciously, forsook the pleasure of sin and the riches of Egypt that were his for the asking—

He didn't have to work for them, or fight for them. They were his if he would just accept that the most important thing about him was that he was the son of Pharaoh's daughter—but Moses knew he belonged to another people—God's people. But the pleasures of the world was a great obstacle in his way to hold him in a life of unbelief and sin.

Today we have in our country a door wide open to the pleasures of sin that shackle the soul. I heard one young person involved in a successful rock band, when asked about his way of life say, 'What more could I ask for? I have all the girls and sex and drugs and rock and roll I want—it's party time all the time—what more is there, what more could a person want?' Do you see the bias of human nature?

Others find pleasure in a busy life and living to buy and furnish a beautiful home—it consumes them—not time for anything else. Others are consumed with their work and work 15-18 hours a day—not time for anything else—not time for God. We could spend all our time just looking at things that are good to have—that are pleasurable to the eyes or are desirable to make one better—things that simply consume the heart and mind and will of mankind and shut God, as it were, out of their soul and out of their life.

We could go on to spend time speaking of fear, pride, popularity, ignorance, and unbelief; all things that make the odds of them ever forsaking sin and coming to faith impossible.

I remember once witnessing to a young man over a couple of months and as we sat in a restaurant having a coffee in New Liskard, Ontario, I asked him if he would receive Christ as his Savior

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and Lord. His reply that came to me was this: ‘I have listened to what you have to say, and you obviously believe, but I simply cannot believe; it is not a matter of evidence or proof; I’d just feel foolish believing. I can’t believe. I can’t commit myself to live by faith in things I cannot see. I just want to live my life as it comes to me. You are a nice guy and all—and thanks but no thanks.’ The unbelieving—the uncommitted life is a great obstacle that holds man in bondage and yet our society holds it up as the best way to live.

I have also met others who, because they thought they were seriously ill and going to die, prayed to God, confessed their sins, and asked Christ to forgive them and save them and come into their life. However, as soon as they found out they were not going to die, they took no further interest in the things of God and went back to their self-centered unbelieving way of life—never able to find time for the things of God. O they found time for golf, sports, and all other things, but no time for God.

Such people remind me of Pharaoh in the OT. You may remember that when Moses first went to Pharaoh with the message that he was to let Israel go that they might worship and serve God that Pharaoh in arrogance replied in Ex.5:2, ‘*Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice and let Israel go. I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go.*’ Then after a few plagues, we read in Ex.9:27 “...and Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said unto them, ‘*I have sinned this time: the Lord is righteous and I and my people are wicked—entreat the Lord that there be no more thundering and hail and I will let you go and you shall stay no longer.*’” Moses entreated God and the thunder and hail stopped—then we read in v.35 “...when Pharaoh saw the rain and hail ceased he sinned yet more and hardened his heart: he and his servants.”

You would think that seeing miracles of judgment and the Lord answering prayer would cause people to permanently repent and obey the Lord; but the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Neither miracles of judgment or miracles of mercy as worked by the Lord Jesus Christ can give man the ability to change his nature and begin to love and obey God.

4. Is saving faith part of man’s natural abilities and powers?

Now I have said all this to bring out the point that coming to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is not natural to any of the fallen race of Adam. What is natural for fallen mankind is to resist God; to resist the truth of God, and to go our own way.

Do you remember what Steven, the first Christian martyr, said to the Jewish leaders in Acts.7:51? After presenting to them a complete overview of the history of Israel and their rejection of God’s chosen servants in the past and their present rejection and crucifixion of the Lord Jesus; Steven says to them, ‘*you stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do you.*’

We are no different in nature from those unbelieving, rejecting people—all men in sin react in the same way—we always resist the Holy Spirit. This is the whole story of fall man in relationship to God. The apostle can say in Rom.3:10-11 ‘*there is none righteous, no not one, there is none that understands, there is none that seek after God.*’

5. How does anyone become a lover of God—a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ—and obedient to the word of God?

Since this is the state of man in sin; stubborn, rebellious, unbelieving, self-willed, ignorant, always resisting the Holy Spirit! How then is anyone ever brought to repentance of sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? How does anyone ever become a lover of God and obedient to his word?

6. It takes a work of God — a miracle to be a Christian — Jn.6:44.

Do you realize that it takes a work of God, a miracle of God to make any sinner a true loving child of God. The Lord Jesus in Jn.6:44 says, ‘No man can come to me except the Father which sent me draw him. Notice the first part, no man can come to me. Notice it does not say ‘no man will come to me’ or ‘no man will desire to come to me’ but rather they cannot come to me.

I say this because I believe there are people who would like to come to Jesus or at least are under the delusion that they can come to Jesus and believe on him when ever they so chose. But the Lord Jesus says ‘no man can come unto me’ they cannot come.

Remember the rich young ruler of Lk.18:18 and following? He thought he could come to Jesus and indeed did to come to Jesus physically. But he found as he heard the Lord’s requirement for eternal life, he was offended. He could not come to the Lord Jesus spiritually and with saving faith, and he went away sorrowing.

Many people think they can come to Jesus at any time they please. They view their salvation from sin as in their own hands, but such people do not know their own hearts and natures. They cannot come of themselves. They will always find something too offensive in the real Christ of God and will leave either sorrowing or greatly upset.

As our Lord Jesus said, the Father must draw every soul that comes to him. By that he means that the Father must overcome all sinful resistance to the Holy Spirit. He must overcome all unbelief, He must overcome all their stubbornness, all their ignorance, all their rebellion, and He must make the unwilling willing. He must make the lovers of darkness, lovers of light. How does he do this? The answer is he does it by conquering grace against all odds.

7. Grace must be exalted with a legitimate right to reign.

Eph.2:8 says we are saved by grace, through faith and that not of ourselves, it is a gift of God not of works lest any man should boast. Grace, God’s grace, must be extended to us; grace that is greater than all our sin. The apostle puts it this way in the book of Rom.5:21 *‘that as sin has reigned unto death even so must grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.’*

God, if I might put it like this, in order to save sinners, had to put grace on the throne. He had to bring in the reign of grace. A reign that gave grace legitimate rights over justice and judgement and wrath so that ungodly, unholy, and undeserving sinners might be pardoned of all sin and declared righteous in God’s sight.

That reign of grace was brought in by the Lord Jesus Christ through his substitutionary death for the sins of his people. When the Lord Jesus, as you heard, died on Calvary’s cross, he did not die just to make salvation possible, if man is willing to have it.

No. No. He actually saved, as Eph.1:4 says, a people chosen by God from before the foundation of the world. When he rose triumphantly from the grave, he did so victorious over sin, securing the salvation of the multitude no man can number and ascended to heaven where he is now the Lamb on the throne, who through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, is saving all he bought with his own blood. Grace reigns!

8. Who are the people who respond to the gospel in saving faith?

In Acts.13:48 we read that when the Gentiles heard this—that is that the gospel of Christ was to be preached to them— they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. God’s grace was reigning and those chosen by God; those ordained to eternal life; were, through the work of grace, believing.

Where ever the Apostles went to preach the gospel, God was working with them. Heb.2:4—the disciples were not simply dependent on their own abilities to persuade men and women of the gospel. No. God was working with them and people were being enlightened, delivered, saved from sin.

Not all who heard were saved or believed, but in every place some were. Some responded with saving faith. Why? Why did Lydia in Acts 16:14 respond in faith to the preaching of the gospel. We read that the Lord opened Lydia's heart, so that she gave attention or listened unto the things which were spoken of Paul. Lydia did not open her own heart to the gospel. The Lord opened her heart.

Again in 1Thess1:4-6, who were these people who responded to the gospel? Verse 4 says, *'knowing brethren beloved your election of God.'* Well, what made these people realize and aware that they were God's beloved chosen people?

He goes on to say, *'...for our gospel came not unto you in word only,'* as some theory or philosophy or psychology of men. No. It came in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance... and you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit.

What overcame unbelief, the stubbornness - the rebellious resisting spirit within them? The apostle says, 'our gospel came' not from within them from the searchings of their own conscience, but it came from God with power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance.

It is the gospel coming in such a manner that is, as the apostle says in Rom.1:16, *'the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes.'* These people experienced the working of God in their lives as they sat under the preaching of the gospel.

We read further in ch.2:13 of 1 Thess these words, *'For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God—that is heard the gospel—which you heard of us, you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God which effectually works also in you that believe.'*

That word effectually is a very important word when it come to understanding the conquering reigning work of grace. The word effectually means that there is the power in the word of God, in the gospel, to achieve or accomplish the purpose or ends that it asks or calls for.

There is nothing quite like the gospel of saving grace. It calls sinners to repent and it brings about the state of heart that repents. It calls men to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and it brings about the state of heart that they can and will believe. This is nothing less than a miracle of God. That is why in Rom.1:1 the gospel is called the gospel of God. He calls a soul to life by giving life.

9. The effectual power of grace demonstrated:

This great truth was demonstrated so many times by the miraculous ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Lk.5:12 a man full of leprosy come to the Lord Jesus and says, 'if you will you can make me clean,' and the Lord Jesus put forth his hand and touched him saying, 'I will: be thou clean,' and immediately the leprosy departed. The power to make clean was in his very words: that an effectual working of the word.

In Lk.5:18, in the same chapter, a man with a paralysis is let down through a roof to where the Lord Jesus was teaching. And the Lord Jesus we read, 'seeing their faith in Him, said to the man, "Thy sins be forgiven thee": the Pharisees said, "This man is speaking blasphemy; no man can forgive sins but God." The Lord Jesus then asks, "Is it easier to say thy sins be forgiven thee or to say rise up and walk? But that you may know that the Son of man has power to forgive sins," he said to the paralyzed man, "rise up and walk," and immediately he rose before them. You see again Christ's word worked effectually, accomplishing what he commanded.

In Lk.5:27 our Lord sees Levi sitting at the seat of customs and he says to him, ‘Follow me,’ and we read he left all, rose up, and followed him.

Or again in John’s gospel ch.11 he said to Lazarus who had been dead for 4 days. ‘Lazarus come forth!’ Have you ever seen anyone more stubborn, resistant against doing anything they are asked than a dead man? Yet we read at Christ’s word he that was dead came forth.

What are the odds of any of these things happening; a leprous man immediately cleaned, a paralyzed man immediately healed; a tax collector leaving all to follow the Lord Jesus; a dead man rising from the dead when called? All these things are impossible to the voice of man. But the Lord Jesus was not just a man. He was God incarnate, and the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation, overcoming and effectually working in all that he calls.

How is this possible? On whose authority—whose merit, is this possible? It is all on the authority and merit of the Lord Jesus Christ: that is the reign of grace in righteousness unto eternal life.

10. What are the evidences that accompany the work of Grace? 1Thess.1:4-6

But lastly what are the evidences that a person has been called by the gospel of grace and is saved from sin. Notice what we are told in 1Thess. 1:5

1. **The gospel comes in power**—that is, authority to arrest our attention. We may have heard many clever people speak, and even heard the gospel many times. But when it comes in power to arrest our attention we feel we are being spoken to directly, personally, and individually by God. We are hearing a message that grips our soul and heart and mind. We are, as it were, thrilled and overcome, we cannot not hear; we want to hear, and we believe what we are hearing.

2. **It comes in the Holy Spirit.** And because the gospel comes in the Holy Spirit, there is always a conviction of sin. We feel our sinfulness. We feel we have sinned against God. We are guilty of the greatest offense it is possible to be guilty of. We feel our unworthiness. We feel we justly deserve to be cast out of God’s sight and into hell forever. We realize that sin is exceeding sinful to God and yet our whole life has been and is being controlled by it. There is a sense of self-loathing and a hatred for sin; a hatred for disobedience to God, for lack of love for God, for lack of faith in God. The presence of the Holy Spirit makes the conviction of sin inevitable. For He is the exact opposite of every thing that sin is and stands for. His presence must of necessity make us feel our poverty of spirit.

3. We also read **the gospel came with much assurance**; that is, in much assurance that sinful though we are and enemies though we are through wicked works; yet God loves us. His love fills our heart. This happens at the same time as the conviction of sin. We feel and sense both at the same time. conviction of sin because of our sinfulness and the Holy Spirit’s presence, but also assurance of being loved by God.

And we see the greatness of his love in sending the Lord Jesus Christ to be a substitute, to take our place, and to bear our sins and guilt in his own body on the tree. There is a sense of guilt yet cleansing; of sinfulness yet forgiven; of ruin yet made whole; of unworthiness yet made acceptable in the Beloved

4. And lastly **there is the joy of the Holy Spirit.** Notice he says you received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit. What is this joy of the Holy Spirit? It is a joy that loves the Lord Jesus Christ and calls him precious. It is a joy that wants to live for him, and please him, and serve him, and be used of him. Life is vain and empty if we cannot walk with him and be useful to him.

It is a joy in Christ, a joy in God, a joy in salvation, a joy in life, a joy in learning the word of God, a joy in obeying the word of God, a joy in the fellowship of other believers, a joy in witnessing to others of the great gospel of free and sovereign grace.

Grace had conquered against all odds. Grace reigns! Christ reigns! And he does so in such away that we not only have been delivered from the burden of sin, the guilt of sin, the power of sin, the kingdom of Satan, the seduction of the world, but we feel and are consciously aware that this deliverance has taken place. We have been reconciled to God by a Savior who has made us holy and without blame and in love before God.

Read some of the great testimonies of men like John Bunyan, John Newton, George Whitefield, and many others

Now does conquering grace stop at conversion? No. It follows us and works effectually in us through out our life. We are really only conscious of it after conversion as God continues to deal with our stubborn wills and resistance to the Holy Spirit. But that I leave for our concluding speaker.