

# Convicted Sinners Can Reject Christ

by John R. Rice

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*The Bible teaches that men can resist God's grace and go to Hell, and that God's offer of salvation is available to all, but men must choose to accept it.*

**Scripture:** Acts 9:5

**Topics:** "Resisting Grace", "Free Will"

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## Description

John R. Rice preaches against the doctrine of 'irresistible grace' in extreme Calvinism, arguing that the Scriptures and human experience show that men do resist the grace of God and the moving of the Holy Spirit. He uses the example of Deacon Stephen confronting the Jewish leaders who resisted the Holy Spirit, and Saul of Tarsus who later became Paul, as evidence of resistance to God's call. Rice emphasizes that every lost sinner could be saved, as the atonement of Christ paid for all sins, but some choose to reject God's offer of mercy and resist the Holy Spirit's conviction.

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## Transcript

The Scriptures show that enlightened, convicted men do resist God, do thwart the grace of God. Men who could be saved, who are set apart by the blood of Christ, men who are bought, resist the Holy Spirit. God's grace is offered all, but is not irresistible, as Calvin taught.

One of the five points of this man-made philosophy of extreme Calvinism is the doctrine of "irresistible grace." By this term Calvin meant, and hyper-Calvinists today mean, that God intended for only a limited number of people to be saved, that the atonement of Christ paid for the sins of only this limited few (the doctrine of "limited atonement," as extreme Calvinists call it); that those who are predestined to be saved cannot resist the grace of God, cannot reject the Saviour but are certain to be saved. For this reason extreme Calvinists are not generally burdened about soul winning since they say, the grace of God is "irresistible."

So if we can show that the Bible teaches that men do resist the grace of God, do resist the moving and conviction of the Holy Spirit, we have proved that extreme Calvinism is simply not true, that it is unscriptural, a man-made philosophy contrary to the Bible. But the Bible and human experience alike prove that men do resist the Spirit of God, do thwart divine grace. Therefore some could be saved who are not saved, and the atonement is for all.

In the seventh chapter of Acts we find Deacon Stephen, a Spirit-filled man of God, speaking before the Sanhedrin and Jewish elders. And Spirit-filled Stephen said, "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers" (Acts 7:51,52).

To these Jewish leaders Stephen said, "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost." So here were people some of whom had seen Jesus and heard Him preach, others who had heard Peter the apostle at Pentecost, others who had heard Stephen and other Spirit-filled men preaching with great power so that "the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). And what had these done? They were stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, that is, they were stubborn in their rebellion against God. They were deliberately "uncircumcised in heart and ears," remaining unconverted. And this resistance against the Holy Spirit went to such length that as they heard Stephen preach, "they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth," and then they took him out of the city and stoned him and killed him! Men did resist the Holy Spirit. These particular men had done so year after year under great moving of the Holy Ghost.

And Stephen said, "As your fathers did, so do ye." So Stephen says that all the way from Abraham through the history of the Jewish nation down to the time of Christ and those same Jewish elders, unconverted Jews had resisted the Holy Spirit!

Thus we must believe, taking the Word of God at face value, that God calls people who do not come. God convicts people who will not repent. God's Spirit moves people to be saved, but they will not be saved.

One of these same Jewish leaders who heard Stephen speak was Saul of Tarsus. Oh, how he hated this new sect of Christians! And now with that hate flaming in his heart and the zeal of Judaism he set out to arrest Christians at Damascus. You see, Paul up to this time was resisting the Holy Ghost, so much so that later God said to him, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" (Acts 9:5). So people do kick against the pricks of God's Holy Spirit. People do resist the call of God. People do resist God's grace and do thwart God's offer of mercy. And that means that those who are not saved could have been saved. Those who reject Christ could have accepted Him. God offers mercy to those who will not have it. Those who go to Hell go, not because God wanted them to go, nor because they were predestined to go to Hell, but they go to Hell because they would not heed the moving of the Holy Spirit on their hearts, and they would not repent when God commanded them to repent. They would not follow the light that God gave them.

Again in Hebrews 10:29 we find the clear statement that men resist God, that sometimes men who are convicted and moved to get saved will not be saved.

Read Hebrews 10:28 and 29 together. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

First, note that God says the damnation of a lost sinner is illustrated by the stoning of rebels against the Mosaic law in the Old Testament. Those who "sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth" (verse 26) are ready for judgment for rejecting the truth. Notice that the sin mentioned is wilful sin

and this involves a certain freedom of the will to sin or not to sin. (I speak not now of the taint in our carnal nature, but in the actual choice of right and wrong, the choice of receiving Christ or rejecting Him.) So a wilful sinner under the Mosaic law, at the mouth of two or three witnesses, was stoned. But then God warns us, "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

Verse 29, here quoted, teaches so clearly that men who turn down Christ do it deliberately and that the punishment is because of the wilfulness of their sin. Notice these sins:

1. They have "trodden under foot the Son of God."
2. Such a man has "counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing."

This may mean either of two things. It may mean that every lost sinner is in some sense sanctified by the death of Christ, that is, potentially set apart for God. Since Jesus is potentially "the Saviour of all men," but "specially of them that believe," as we are expressly told (I Tim. 4:10), then the blood of Jesus, potentially, sets apart every sinner in the world for God. That is saying no more than I Corinthians 15:22: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." Every poor sinner is bought by the blood of Jesus. He is the propitiation "for the sins of the whole world" (I John 2:2).

Or some will think that "the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified" refers to the blood of animal sacrifices which Jews gave. They think that every Jew was thus sanctified or set apart by a covenant of blood. But if so, that does not change the essential meaning. If every Jew was set apart by bloody sacrifices, then those bloody sacrifices typified the blood of Christ and the blood of Christ surely went as far as the blood of bulls and goats! This Scripture plainly teaches that the blood of Jesus Christ has set apart every sinner for salvation. Some do not accept the salvation that is offered. Jesus is "the Saviour of the world," although not all the world will take Him as Saviour. Jesus is "the propitiation for our sins: and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (I John 2:2), although some people do not accept the blessed gift that is given. So here the Scripture is teaching that the blood of Christ has purchased people for salvation who do not take salvation.

But the third thing this Scripture says about such a sinner who rejects Christ is that he "hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace." The blessed Holy Spirit who calls the sinner and whom he resists is insulted and abused by the Christ-rejecting sinner!

Oh, poor lost sinner, when you go to Hell you must remember that you have trodden under foot the Son of God. You must remember that when you go to Hell you counted the blood of Jesus shed for you an unholy thing. In Hell, poor lost sinner, you must remember that you were called and pleaded with and convicted and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, but you insulted that Spirit, you did "despite unto the Spirit of grace."

We are talking here about the grace of God which is so freely offered to sinners by the Holy Spirit. And sinners resist and reject that grace of God and insult the Holy Spirit who pleads with them, so teaches the Word of God.

So every lost sinner could be saved. The death of Christ met the requirements and paid for his sins. The precious blood is a holy thing which would pay the entire debt. The Holy Spirit of God calls in grace but sinners refuse. This Scripture does not teach "irresistible grace," but it teaches the grace of God offered to

all men so that all could be saved and all ought to be saved.

Second Peter, chapter 2, is given up to a discussion of false prophets. The whole 22 verses are on this subject and the chapter starts off with this statement: "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them and bring upon themselves swift destruction."

These false teachers bring in damnable heresies "denying the Lord that bought them."

Here is the strange statement that even false teachers are bought by the blood of Jesus Christ.

This chapter goes to great detail to show that these false prophets are lost people, certain of the judgment of God. Verse 3 says of them, "Whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not." The rest of the chapter tells us how God who spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to Hell, will not spare these false teachers. Verse 5 tells us that as God destroyed the ungodly in the flood, so He will destroy these false teachers. These false teachers are described in verse 12 "as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed." Verse 17 speaks of these false teachers as "wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever." These false teachers are ungodly men who will go to Hell. They are men "even denying the Lord who bought them."

Nothing could more clearly show that these men are included in the atoning death of Christ, they are included in the grace of God which would save everyone. But they resist the grace of God, they reject the call of the Spirit, they exercise the freedom of their wills to reject Christ and be lost.

Men do resist the will of God and go to Hell, who could be saved. And that shows the folly of this man-made philosophy of hyper-Calvinism. It shows the falsity of this human doctrine of "limited atonement," this human doctrine of "irresistible grace," this doctrine that some are "foreordained to reprobation" as others are "foreordained to be saved."

I do not need to call attention to the fact that those of us who are saved in most cases long resisted the call of God. In Genesis 6:3 we are told that the Holy Spirit strives with men and then sometimes ceases striving. In Acts 24:25 we are told how as Paul "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled .. " No doubt this blessed Spirit of God convicted Felix and spoke to his heart. He waited for a convenient season and, we suppose, kept on waiting and went to Hell. But he cannot say that he might not have been saved. He can never say that the Spirit of God did not call him, did not convict him, did not show him his need.

The very fact that Christians are warned against the sin of quenching the Spirit (I Thess. 5:19) and are solemnly warned, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God" (Eph. 4:30), shows that the grace of God is not irresistible. Man has certain moral freedom of choice. Lost men must choose whether or not they will be saved. And saved people must choose whether or not they will more perfectly follow the Lord than they do.

God's grace offers salvation to all men. All could accept it; some do not.

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