

The Tragic Tale of Charles Templeton

Charles Templeton on left, Billy Graham on right
A Good Beginning Is No guarantee of a good ending!

One of the most difficult passages in the New Testament (and really in the entire Bible) is Hebrews 6:4-6:

For in the case of **those who have once been enlightened** and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

Charles Templeton is an example of a man who surely had "**once been enlightened**", had "**tasted of the heavenly gift**", had been made a partaker "**of the Holy Spirit**", had "**tasted the good word of God**" and the "**power of the age to come.**"

You may never have heard the name Charles Templeton, but you surely have heard the name Billy Graham. Charles Templeton (1915-2001) first professed faith in 1936 when he "got religion" as he put it, and everything changed. Lured by the news that the Cleveland Colored Quartet would be performing at Toronto's Parkdale Church of the Nazarene, he attended the service and experienced an emotional "conversion." For the next twenty years, he devoted himself to bringing about the same experience in the lives of others. Along with Oswald J. Smith, as well as several American evangelists and church leaders, he formed **Youth for Christ International** and led some of the largest weekly Youth for Christ gatherings in North America. From 1944 to 1948, Templeton's evangelistic rallies packed 2,800 young people into the auditorium of Toronto's Massey Hall. Each Saturday evening, the audience heard what one reporter referred to as "old-fashioned repent-and-be-saved gospel preaching." Drawing on traditional evangelical Protestantism, Templeton urged young men and women to confess their sins, accept Christ as their Savior, and, with the Holy Spirit's help, live a life pleasing to God. Living for Jesus was the ultimate "thrill," Templeton informed his audiences. He told young men and women that Christ was "the most exciting man who's ever lived ... the most extraordinary man who's ever lived," and not just a man, but God Himself.

In 1945 Templeton met Billy Graham and the two became friends, rooming and ministering together during a 1946 YFC evangelistic tour in Europe ([Click to see the photographs and go to the bottom of the page to see how large the gatherings were](#)). Despite these experiences one of the two men wrote the following about himself..

The particular intellectual problem I was wrestling with, for the first time since my conversion as a teenager, was the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures. Seeming contradictions and problems with interpretation defied intellectual solutions, or so I thought. Could the Bible be trusted completely?...

You are probably thinking that was Charles Templeton, but you would be wrong, for it was Billy Graham. And yet within two years after the European tour, in about 1948 Templeton's life and worldview was beginning to go in a different direction than Graham's (who obviously had resolved his doubts about the authority of the Scriptures). So instead of Graham, it was Templeton who began to have serious doubts about the Christian faith as he was planning to enter Princeton Theological Seminary. And even after he began to drift from Biblical truth, during the 1950s and '60s, Templeton preached to crowds of 10,000 to 30,000 nightly. He packed stadiums and thrilled audiences with his proclamation of "the gospel of Christ," as he believed it to be. And then we "fast forward" to about 1957, when Templeton would publicly declare that he had become an agnostic!

In his 1996 memoir, [Farewell to God: My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith \(BORROW BOOK\) - PAGE 6](#), Templeton recounted a conversation with Graham in Montreal prior to entering seminary...

All our differences came to a head in a discussion which, better than anything I know, "explains" Billy Graham and his phenomenal success as an evangelist. In the course of our conversation I said, "But, Billy, it's simply not possible any longer to believe, for instance, the biblical account of creation. The world was not created over a period of days a few thousand years ago; it has evolved over millions of years. It's not a matter of speculation; it's a demonstrable fact."

"I don't accept that," Billy said. "And there are reputable scholars who don't."

"Who are these scholars?" I said. "Men in conservative Christian colleges?"

"Most of them, yes," he said. "But that is not the point. I believe the Genesis account of creation because it's in the Bible. I've discovered something in my ministry: When I take the Bible literally, when I proclaim it as the word of God, my preaching has power. When I stand on the platform and say, 'God says,' or 'The Bible says,' the Holy Spirit uses me. There are results. Wiser men than you or I have been arguing questions like this for centuries. I don't have the time or the intellect to examine all sides of the theological dispute, so I've decided once for all to stop questioning and accept the Bible as God's word."

"But Billy," I protested, "You cannot do that. You don't dare stop thinking about the most important question in life. Do it and you begin to die. It's intellectual suicide."

"I don't know about anybody else," he said, "but I've decided that that's the path for me."

(Another quote from [Farewell to God: My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith - BORROW BOOK - page 232](#)) - "I believe that there is no supreme being with human attributes--no God in the Biblical sense --but that life is the result of timeless evolutionary force (**ED: DO NOT MISS THE POTENTIAL DANGER OF BELIEF IN EVOLUTION! DEAR READER WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE, THE LITERAL TRUTH OF THE BIBLE OR UNPROVEN AND UNPROVABLE SCIENTIFIC THEORY? [What does the Bible say about Creation vs. evolution?](#)**), having reached its present transient state over millions of years....How can one believe the Biblical account of the creation of the world in six days when every eminent physicist agrees that all living species have evolved over millions of years from primitive beginnings. (**ED: BUT WHO BEGAN THOSE "PRIMITIVE BEGINNINGS?"**)....'I believe that, in common with all living creatures, we die and cease to exist as an entity.' (page 233) (**ED: TODAY TEMPLETON SADLY HAS REALIZED HE WILL EXIST FOREVER IN A PLACE OF ETERNAL PUNISHMENT AND THAT HIS PUNISHMENT WILL BE EVEN GREATER THAN OTHERS BECAUSE OF THE LIGHT THAT HE RECEIVED. cf. Lk 10:13-15+. TEMPLETON BELIEVED THE LIE OF [ANNIHILATIONISM](#) - [CLICK NOTE](#)**)."

And so we have in the life of Charles Templeton, a man who surely experienced all of the attributes described in Hebrews 6:4-5+ and yet he fell away from all he had experienced from 1936 to 1948, over 20 years of evangelizing for Christ! Amazing! And as the writer of Hebrews warns, it is impossible to renew such a one again to repentance. And now for the rest of the story....

Charles Templeton
Decades After Picture at top of page

Some 50 years after Templeton had begun to reject Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life, investigative reporter Lee Strobel interviewed him for his best selling book **The Case for Christ** (the writing of which led the skeptic Strobel himself to become a believer in Jesus Christ!) published in 2000 (BORROW - [A Case For Christ](#) - see page 304. Or [watch the movie \(must buy or rent\) \(Free in Espanol\)](#) - if you are an honest skeptic, this information might just change your eternal destiny!) and here is Strobel's record of the interchange as Strobel ask Templeton...

"And how do you assess this Jesus?" It seemed like the next logical question—but I wasn't ready for the response it would evoke.

Templeton's body language softened. It was as if he suddenly felt relaxed and comfortable in talking about an old and dear friend. His voice, which at times had displayed such a sharp and insistent edge, now took on a melancholy and reflective tone. His guard seemingly down, he spoke in an unhurried pace, almost nostalgically, carefully choosing his words as he talked about Jesus.

"He was," Templeton began, "the greatest human being who has ever lived. He was a moral genius. His ethical sense was unique. He was the intrinsically wisest person that I've ever encountered in my life or in my readings. His commitment was total and led to His own death, **much to the detriment of the world** (**ED: DO NOT MISS THAT CRITICAL STATEMENT. CONTRAST John 3:16+**). What could one say about Him except that this was a form of greatness?"

I was taken aback. "You sound like you really care about Him," I said.

"Well, yes, He is the most important thing in my life," came his reply. "I . . . I . . . I . . .," he stuttered, searching for the right word, 'I know it may sound strange, but I have to say . . . I adore Him!' . . .

". . . Everything good I know, everything decent I know, everything pure I know, I learned from Jesus. Yes . . . yes. And tough! Just look at Jesus. He castigated people. He was angry. People don't think of Him that

way, but they don't read the Bible. He had a righteous anger. He cared for the oppressed and exploited. There's no question that He had the highest moral standard, the least duplicity, the greatest compassion, of any human being in history. There have been many other wonderful people, but Jesus is Jesus....'

"Uh . . . but . . . no,' he said slowly, 'he's the most . . .' He stopped, then started again. "In my view," he declared, "He is the most important human being who has ever existed."

That's when Templeton uttered the words I never expected to hear from him. "And if I may put it this way," he said as his voice began to crack, 'I . . . miss . . . Him!"

With that tears flooded his eyes. He turned his head and looked downward, raising his left hand to shield his face from me. His shoulders bobbed as he wept. . . .

Templeton fought to compose himself. I could tell it wasn't like him to lose control in front of a stranger. He sighed deeply and wiped away a tear. After a few more awkward moments, he waved his hand dismissively. Finally, quietly but adamantly, he insisted: "Enough of that." (**BORROW** - [A Case For Christ](#) - see page 306)

And so we see a living example of Hebrews 6:4-6+!

For in the case of those who **have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come**, and then have fallen away ([parapipto](#) - aorist tense = a historical event; active voice = a volitional choice, choice of their will!), it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

A man who professed Jesus and even spoke of Him affectionately, but not as the sinless Son of God, not as the One Who bore Templeton's sins on Calvary. This has to be one of the saddest, most tragic stories of falling away in the twentieth century! I re-read it often and every time I read it, I become so sad.

ADDENDUM - The Sad Example of [Harry Emerson Fosdick](#) - There are many such people in the history of the Christian church. The most prominent liberal when I was growing up was Harry Emerson Fosdick. Dr. Fosdick was a well known individual throughout the country. He was a New York preacher and was quite gifted and who denied the facts of the Christian faith. Later on in his life there was report that Dr. Fosdick had repented of his previous beliefs and that he had now become a believer in the Word of God. However, I ran across a statement by him in which he said that he did not change any of his view points and so demonstrated by speaking out against the inspiration of the Scriptures, the Virgin Birth, and the atonement. These statements were made after he supposedly "repented." But here we have an example a man whose life was one, constant, continuous life opposed to the truth of the Word of God. (See [Tim Challies' article on false teacher Harry Fosdick](#))

Related Resources:

- Wayne Grudem's 50 page discussion on "Perseverance of the Sains: A Case Study from the Warning Passages of Hebrews" - BORROW [Still Sovereign, PAGE 132](#)
- [What does the Bible say about perseverance? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [Perseverance of the Saints - is it biblical? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [What are some Bible verses about perseverance? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- Counterfeit New Births - What the New Birth is Not!
- [Watch the full movie - A Case for Christ - story of reporter Lee Strobel](#)- only available to buy or rent ([Free in Espanol](#))
- [Audiobook \(11 hours, 42 minutes\) online - A Case for Christ](#)
- [What is apostasy and how can I recognize it? Gotquestions.org](#)
- [If our salvation is eternally secure, why does the Bible warn so strongly against apostasy?](#)
- [The slippery slide to unbelief](#)
- [Death of an apostate](#)
- [19th century minister to colleague: Darwin will drag you down](#)
- [How can I have assurance of my salvation? Gotquestions.org](#)
- [Eternal security - is it biblical? Gotquestions.org](#)
- [Is eternal security a "license" to sin? Gotquestions.org](#)