

How to Lose Your Salvation

This is written to professing Christians who have “accepted” Jesus and who believe Him to be their Lord and Savior and, therefore, consider themselves as having eternal security and everlasting life in heaven.

Have you checked your faith lately as the Holy Spirit tells us to do in 2 Corinthians 13:5? Within what is called the “Christian” community, there are probably as many subtle differences and degrees of “faith” as there are people professing to be of the faith. I suspect that somewhere across this spectrum is a dividing line between what a saving faith is and what isn’t quite good enough to get one through that “narrow gate” into heaven. I’m persuaded that within all of that favorable part of the spectrum, there needs to be that quality which “continues to the end.”

There was a man who died just a few years ago, whose life expressed the very issue which I’ve chosen to be the title of this paper. He was a brilliant man. He claimed to have no faith in his early youth, although his mother was apparently a believer. Then one night, when he was about 19 years old he but let’s let him tell it to you in his own words.

“She began to talk about God, about the happiness her faith had brought her, and about how she longed to see me with the other children in church. I heard little of what she was saying; my mind was doing an inventory of my life. Suddenly it seemed empty and wasted and sordid. I said, “I m going to my room.”

“As I went down the hall, I was forming a prayer in my head, but as I knelt by my bed in the darkness, my mind was strangely vacant; thoughts and words wouldn’t come to focus. After a moment, it was as though a black blanket had been draped over me. A sense of enormous guilt descended and invaded every part of me. I was unclean.”

Involuntarily, I began to pray, my face upturned, tears streaming. The only words I could fin, were, “Lord come down, Come down, Come down...”

“It may have been minutes later, or much longer, there was no sense of time, but I found myself, my head in my hands, crunched small on the floor at the center of a vast emptiness. The agonizing was past. It had left me numb, speechless, immobilized, alone and tense with a sense of expectancy. In a moment, a weight began to lift, a weight as heavy as I. It passed through my thighs, my belly, my chest, my arms, and my shoulder and lifted off entirely. I could have leaped over a wall. An ineffable warmth began to suffuse every corpuscle. It seemed that a light had turned on in my chest and its refining fire had cleansed me. I hardly dared breathe, fearing that I might end or alter the moment. I heard myself whispering softly, over and over, “Than you Lord. Thank You Lord. Thank you. Thank you....”

“After a while I went to mother’s room. She saw my face and said, “Oh Chuck..!” and burst into tears. We talked for an hour.”

“When I went back to my bedroom, dawn was just breaking. I undressed, drew the shade, climbed into bed, and lay motionless in the diminishing darkness, bathed in a radiant, overwhelming happiness. Outside, the birds began their first tentative singing and I began to laugh softly, out of an indescribable sense of well being at the center of an exultant, all encompassing joy.”

Could there be a much stronger indication of a supernatural experience than this? To him as it might be to anyone, it was a life changing experience. A few months later he resigned from his position at the newspaper office in order to prepare for the Christian ministry. His name was Charles Templeton. If you are old enough you may have heard of him, because in the 1950’s he was the greatest evangelist of that period. As a contemporary of Billy Graham, he was at that time, far better known than Graham. For a while he and Graham, when they were in their early thirties, traveled together all over the U.S. and other countries taking turns at the pulpit. He was a co-founder of Youth for Jesus, an organization that grew very rapidly and soon became international. Even in the

early years, he often drew crowds of as much as 30,000 at a time. In one town having a population of 128,000, during a 2-week campaign, his audience totaled 91,000.

He had no formal education or training for the ministry. He simply read everything he could find and said the he “learned to preach by preaching and aping others.” After a while he managed to get into Princeton Theological Seminary. Only because of his incredible success as an evangelist was he allowed in as a special student. He could not receive a degree because he had not met the prerequisites, having only gone through 9th grade in high school. He did graduate and later received an honorary doctorate of divinity.

He functioned as an internationally known and respected evangelist for 21 years. However, during the last 7 years of his ministry he had increasingly strong doubts as to the validity of what he preached, until he felt compelled to resign and completely forsake the faith. In 1995 after many years of proclaiming himself to be an agnostic, he wrote a book called, “Farwell to God,” which tells the story I’ve only touched on herein.

Here we have a man who had a very strong spiritual experience which changed his life and for a large part of 21 years caused him to be an ardent believer, and motivated him to become a world-renowned professor and communicator of the Christian faith. Is there anyone in the world who knows, or believes he knows the prerequisites qualities of a born-again, saved, redeemed Christian? Who knew or knows of Charles Templeton, who would have doubted that he was so blessed? Yet for most of the last half of his life, he wrote and lectured agnosticism! From what I’ve read, I would call it more correctly, atheism. The book “Farwell to God,” is for the most part, a synopsis of the Bible, in which he attacks nearly every precept, making a mockery of nearly everything true Christians find sacred. There is nothing original in his arguments. They are nothing different than what “science” and secular theology have used ad nauseam to discredit God’s Word. I’m tempted here to cite a few of his more sophomoric denunciations of Scripture, but it should suffice to say for this present purpose that he was provably “dead” wrong in every criticism of the Bible.

So what happened? Was Templeton born-again during that supernatural event at age 19 and so remains saved in spite of decades of total denial of God's existence and of the resurrections of Jesus? Did he lose his salvation, or was he never saved? The answer is obvious. It is one, or the other of only two of the three choices. The remainder of this paper will consist of possible clues to the answer, and what we can learn from this tragic example.

First the clues. Note, in his description of the supernatural event. His mind was "strangely vacant," and it was as though a "black blanket had been draped over me." It should be noted that mediums and others who engage in occult practices use the techniques of vacating the mind in order to consult with the "spiritual world" to let these spirits enter them and guide them. This is not ever the Holy Spirit, but evil spirits who operate in this manner. Obviously, this is only speculation in terms of what may have happened to Templeton, but the technique is real and one of Satan's very effective devices. Other significant factors in his life were the circumstances before and after his "conversion." Prior to that fateful moment, he had shunned church and everything connected with it, even though his mother was of the faith and kept urging him. He had no knowledge of the Scripture, or of its meaning, or the intricacies of the Christian faith. Yet after some reading of the Bible, he jumped deeply and completely into evangelizing, into preaching, and into advising thousands on spiritual matters. Applying his gifts of eloquence, enthusiasm, fervor, articulation, and personality he was propelled almost instantly into fame and power over a spiritually hungry, seeking populous. He was like a person who never had a flying lesson, but who got into the pilot's seat of a 747 filled with passengers. He has figured out how to get the plane off the ground, but now has no ability to fly it or land it safely. How many of his "passengers" died unnecessarily because he failed to land in their hearts the full meaning of the Gospel? How many souls are lost today because of a similar half-truth, "lite," comfortable and misleading Gospel emanating from the lips of modern day "evangelists"? He never became grounded in Scripture. He seems to have been able to grab a few truths, though he never really apprehended them into himself. Nevertheless, he ran with them most impressively, but

with no depth of understanding. He said that he chose to ape others. Perhaps parroting without understanding would have been more accurate. But we must not underestimate the power of such actions. In today's amusement-addicted culture, who are the heroes, the most persuasive, and the most honored? Its actors! Those who "ape and parrot" scripts written and directed by others. Society tends to credit the actors with the bigger than life qualities they portray. This in turn tends to convince the actors that they are in fact "as gods" and not subject to mortal (or moral) limits. Can't you see Satan's handiwork through this same process both in Templeton and throughout our present world and its systems?

Templeton personifies the man in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:20, who "...received the seed into stony places, the same is he that hears the word and with joy receives it, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for awhile..." With Templeton, it seems to have loosely endured for the better part of 21 years. He had no real sustaining roots. What little roots he may have had seemed to have been pulled up quite easily as we shall see. He calls to mind a period where he was evangelizing in a "dreary Michigan town" where he spent his spare time in reading Thomas Paine's, "Age of Reason" and the works of other atheists such as, Voltaire, Bertrand Russell, Robert Ingersol, David Hume and Thomas Huxley. After reading Thomas Paine, he says in his memoirs that, "In a few hours, nearly everything I knew and believed about the Christian religion was challenged and in large part demolished. My unsophisticated mind had no defenses against the thrust of his logic or his devastating arguments." Had he been steeped in Scripture, as one must be to know God's truth, had the Holy Spirit opened the eyes of his heart to God's Word, he would have had an immutable "defense" against any of man's logic. He would have known that even the "foolishness of God" is wiser than the wisdom and reason of any man. He had no roots; his foundation was built in sand, and, therefore, the first rain, or wind of human reason washed away the sand and with it his faith.

There is one last clue as to his chronic weakness of faith. This is a difficultly all loners face. I wrote about this extensively in a previous paper called "Spiritual Stumbling." He lacked a spiritually strong "faith partner." In his book he says:

The old doubts were resurfacing. I would cover them over with prayer and activity but soon there would be a wisp of smoke and a flicker of flame and then a firestorm of doubt. I would banish them only to have them return. Part of the problem was that there was no one to talk to. How does a man who, each night tells ten to twenty thousand people how to find faith, confess that he is struggling with his own?

There seems to be no evidence in his writings that Templeton ever returned to believing or even tried to reexamine the “evidences” which led him away. How could anyone so seemingly strong in his profession of belief, so stellar in his expressions of faith, and so convincing to so many, lose his faith so easily? Faith and salvation are inseparable, for we are “saved by grace through faith.” Does that mean that when he lost his faith he lost his salvation? Of course not! Although in such an extreme case as this, anyone with less than the rudimentary knowledge of Christian teaching might conclude that here was just such a situation. Based on the evidence it appears that he never did have a saving faith. His, appears to be a false faith and I suspect that he also preached false Gospel. Perhaps it was not false in what it said, but false because of what it omitted, and, therefore, false in the sense that it led many to a pseudo salvation.

This thought stems from another clue gleaned from his book. In it he quotes a news article about his ministry which included the following:

I have just seen the man who’s giving religion a brand new look; a young Canadian by the name of Charles Templeton. Passing up the old hell-fire and damnation oratorical fireworks, he uses instead an attractive, persuasive approach that presents religion as a commodity as necessary to life as salt, and in the doing, has set a new standard for mass evangelism.

Dispensing with such props as the “sawdust trail” the “Mourner’s Bench” and other tricks from the old-fashioned evangelist’s repertoire, he is winning converts at an average of 150 a night and what is something new in modern evangelism, they stay converted.

The question is “stay converted” to what, a false shallow belief such as his own? Who knows? Apparently the writer of the article knew nothing of significance regarding Christian faith, or this idea of religion as a commodity would not have been so favorably reported. Nevertheless, in that respect he was correct. That is exactly what Templeton did. He was simply an early practitioner of the “New Evangelism” which is more like a worldly business seeking its “market share” of a “religious commodity” than it is a faith based ministry seeking to bring repentant sinners to salvation.

The important thing here is what we have learned, or can learn from Templeton’s experience. I believe there is much of significance here for anyone who takes salvation seriously, and especially one who is weak in Scriptural knowledge, and complacent about their faith.

1. First the title of this paper. It was meant to be provocative; Scripture makes it abundantly clear that if you are saved you cannot lose your salvation. There is no such thing as losing it if you have it. Knowledge of this fact is basic, and requires no significant amount of Biblical study. Simple common sense will tell you that an omniscient Creator God will not save and then unsave or resave anyone. Only a God who could not know the future could be so limited as to see some saving condition of one’s heart today, but later have to change his mind or remove the gift because he later saw a changed heart. The Creator God, knew before the beginning of time every aspect, every thought and emotion and act in each of our lives. Because of this He also knew who would come truly to a saving faith through which His irrevocable gift of salvation would be appropriately received. Only God knows what was in Templeton’s heart when he died. However, if one is to judge by the evidence of his own words and deeds, one would conclude that he was not saved.
2. What about the impressive “spiritual” experience Templeton had at age nineteen? Surely it was life changing in a way which would seem to have been positive in terms of how it changes his life, at least for a while. Yet what

fruit did it bear? Perhaps, from the short-term perspective of the time of his heyday as an evangelist, one might have said that his response to this “calling” bore much fruit. But did it? It’s difficult to know. The secular columnist said, “they stay converted.” This was only because church attendance increased as a result of his sermons. But does church attendance have any direct relationship to salvation? Doesn’t it depend a great deal on what a particular church offers, and what is received into one’s heart? False gospel is not necessarily false words. A false gospel can be false simply by omission of certain elements which are essential to the understanding of what constitutes a saving faith. The “New Evangelism” which now seems to be dominate within the “Christian” church is precisely that! It attracts or calls many, but does it plow the ground in such a manner as to facilitate a saving faith? No! It just makes a great many think they are saved, when they are not, because they are not told enough to even know that they don’t know what it is to have a saving faith!

Back to the “spiritual” event. As he described it, and based on the rest of his life, there is ample reason to believe that it was Satan who orchestrated the event and who guided him the rest of his life. The whole process is not at all inconsistent with what Scripture tells us regarding how Satan works. We know him to be the great deceiver. His compelling ways never appear to be evil. Who would be persuaded by evil? All of his evil is coated with good so as to hide the evil. What better way to achieve his purpose, then to convince someone that he is saved when he is not. How better to do this than to convince someone of great talent that he has a sincere calling to preach the Gospel, and to then motivate him to preach a false gospel which can lead thousands to a false faith or to a faith too weak to warrant salvation? How diabolically clever to then later cast such heavy doubts in him so as to have him renounce his beliefs, his ministry, and even God! Think of how many who heard him, and heard of him, he may have “taken down” with him as he proclaimed with much notoriety that Jesus is not God, that there is no God,

and that Scripture is a fable! Satan scored big in two ways with this agent. His cleverness is almost boundless!

3. Back again to the “spiritual” event. How does one come to believe that one is born-again? Often it seems to have been the result of some sort of spiritual event, not too different from the one Templeton experienced. But his experience should give pause to anyone who has had such an event and claims it as the basis of his or her salvation. It would seem that Templeton’s story should cause one to most carefully reexamine such an event and what has followed over the years in terms of a changed life. It took Templeton most of 21 years to finally fall away, concluding that there could be no salvation because there wasn’t even a God!

From this we may conclude that not all spiritual events are of God, (although some, no doubt, are), because Satan also has the power to cause such things and to make them so real and believable as to almost “fool the elect.” Consider the apparitions of Mary for instance. How many millions “swear” by these as godly messages, yet nothing in Scripture remotely indicates that such manifestations derive from the Holy Spirit.

4. The Templeton story should remind us of what Scripture tells us repeatedly regarding the validity and nature of a saving faith. Absent a contrite heart, the recognition of our sinful nature, an on-going confession of our sins, a sincere repentance, and the continuance of a much changed life, any claimed faith is not likely to be a saving faith.
5. In the same vein but with specific references, his story should bring to mind a number of Scripture verses such as:

Philippians 3:12 "...work out your own salvation with fear in trembling."
Apparently Templeton finally did this and found that there was nothing there to work out.

2 Corinthians 13:5 "Examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith: prove your own selves." He did this eventually and realized that he didn't even believe, let alone have faith.

1 Corinthians 15:1, 2 "Moreover brethren, I declare unto you the Gospel, which I preached unto you, which also ye received, and wherein ye stand. By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain." Whatever Templeton believed, or thought he believed, was obviously in vain.

Hebrews 3:6 "...but Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." Here is that huge terrifying word, IF, which occurs many times in a similar context. IF we hold fast "...firm to the end." Obviously Templeton didn't, because there was never anything of substance on which to hold fast.

Oh dear God, how many professing Christians there are today, who are like Templeton, and many of those he influenced, have nothing but an abstraction where they believe there is a saving faith. I pray the Holy Spirit will lead each of them into your precious Word and thereby complete the process of redemption, which "New Evangelism" so miserably fails to do.

Amen.