

# **Was Charles Darwin a Christian?**

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## **Charles Darwin - The Man**

A man who has greatly influenced the world of science and religion; A man born into a wealthy family. This gave him much free time. A man with an inquisitive mind; one who possessed great power of observation. A man of religion; He was familiar with the Anglican Church, The Unitarian Church, Deism, and Naturalism.

He was born February 12, 1809, the same day as Abraham Lincoln was born. He was sprinkled November 17, 1809, at St. Chad's Anglican Church. He died April 19, 1882 at age 73. He is buried in Westminster Abbey, in close proximity to Sir Isaac Newton.

What kind of person was Charles Darwin? How would history remember him? He was a very complex individual. He claimed great affection and respect for the Holy Scriptures. He approved the work of missionaries. He was a student of natural science and geology.

As a young man, Charles indulged himself. In his college life he ran with the wealthy, upper class students. It is said they attended classes only when they were "fun." He joined the Gourmet or Glutton's Club. The students enjoyed long, drawn out dinners. They played cards and sometimes drank too much.

## **Charles Darwin's Family Life**

Father - Robert Waring Darwin (1766-1848). A gigantic man six-foot, six inches tall and weighing 330 pounds. Charles writes of his father: "His chief mental characteristics were his power of observation and his sympathy which I have never seen exceeded or even equalled." He was an atheist. Charles knew the contempt his father held for Christianity.

Grandfather - Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802). A pre-eminent physician of the eighteenth century. He supported the colonists in their struggle for freedom. He was the first declared English evolutionist. He held the "Enlightenment" spirit. In his book *Zoonomia; or, the Laws of Organic Life* (1794-1796), he rejects the claims of the Bible as a supernatural authority. Erasmus was a Deist, but his son Robert became an atheist.

Mother - Susannah Wedgwood (1765-1817). Nothing much has been written concerning her.

Wife - Emma Wedgwood (1808-1896). After a short engagement, Charles and Emma were married on January 19, 1839, at St. Peter's Anglican Church. They attended the Unitarian Church on Little Portland Street.

Daughter - Henrietta Litchfield (1843-1929) had these recollections of her mother: "She went regularly to church and took the Sacrament. She read the Bible with us and taught us a simple Unitarian Creed, though we were baptized and confirmed in the Church of England."

Emma believed the greatest peril her beloved husband faced in rejecting the Bible was that he would not participate in the resurrection from the dead with her. This was a hope that she cherished with utmost

sincerity. She wrote, "Everything that concerns you, concerns me and I should be most unhappy if I thought we did not belong to each other forever."

Three Older Sisters - Emily Catherine, Caroline, and Susan Caroline tried to encourage Charles to read his Bible more, which he promised to do.

Brother - Erasmus Alvey Darwin (1804-1881). Erasmus was interested in literature and art.

### **Men Who Greatly Influenced Charles Darwin**

Joseph Priestly (1733-1804). Charles Darwin's mother and father were educated under Priestly. He grounded the family in Unitarianism. Priestly had rejected the teaching of the Church of England. Priestly wrote "*A History Of The Corruption of Christianity*," in which he attacked the most important tenets of historical Christianity. He denied the deity of Christ, the existence of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus' atonement for the sins of human beings. "Jesus, a mere man, underwent inexpressible suffering to exhibit a most perfect example of voluntary obedience to the will of God.

Dr. Robert Edmond Grant (1793-1874). Dr. Grant was a highly respected Zoologist. He encouraged Charles to join the Plinian Society. The Plinian Society was composed of a group of twenty-five students. They met together to provide a forum in which they could discuss matters of science. About three weeks after joining the Plinian Society Charles and Dr. Grant attended a lecture by John James Audubon. This pushed Charles over the edge. Gone was any desire to study medicine.

Dr. Grant, like Charles's father, was an atheist. Grant admired Lamarck. Lamarck was a Deist. His book, *Zoological Philosophy*, was written with "an explicit goal or purpose to destroy the belief in the biblical concept of the fixity of kinds."

Charles Lyell (1797-1875) was a lawyer turned geologist. He would come to be known as "the high priest of uniformitarianism." He was raised as an Anglican but later converted to Unitarianism or Deism. Lyell gave himself to the task of demolishing any credibility of the Genesis Flood as a means of exploring geological formations of the earth. Lyell's principle was, "The present is the key to the past."

### **Darwin's Vocations**

Charles started out to be a physician. Charles, being sixteen years old, entered the University of Edinburgh on October 15, 1825. This school was known as the "Athens of the North." It was not confined to any doctrinal statement of faith like Oxford, or Cambridge. It was a home for religious rebels and dissenters, independents and atheists. Evolutionary themes were bandied about and held to by many.

Charles enrolled in the faculty of Medicine. He considered most of the lectures to be very boring and dull. So in November 1826, Charles returned to Edinburgh alone and Erasmus, his brother, enrolled at Cambridge.

Charles began to think about his future. He knew that he would never have to worry about making a living. There was no need to prepare for a career. Charles began attending lectures in geology and zoology instead of medicine. In the summer of 1827, with his father's blessings, he transferred to Cambridge to take up studies for the Anglican ministry. Why did Charles Darwin choose to become a minister? His father knew that Charles was drawn to natural science and many ministers were also naturalists. Becoming a respected minister would give Charles a secure position, much time for leisure, and there was no risk of failure.

The Darwins were high on the social ladder and the ministry would open the door to many of the "high and mighty." Charles then needed a degree from an English university. Family tradition prevailed and Cambridge became the university of choice. Charles, nor Robert, his father, ever imagined the idea that a minister was called by God, to preach the Gospel and to bring glory to God.

The two universities, Oxford and Cambridge, were controlled and operated by the Church of England. Upon graduation each graduate had to sign a pledge that he held to and supported the thirty-nine articles of faith. Charles was at that time a Unitarian. The first article had him trapped, but the end always justifies the means.

The first of the thirty-nine articles of faith reads: "There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts or passions, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

Charles states, "As I did not in the least doubt the strict and literal truth of every word in the Bible, I soon persuaded myself that our creed must be fully accepted. It never struck me how illogical it was to say that I believed in what I could not understand." Alas, Charles had no calling. His heart was never moved.

### **Charles Darwin's Accomplishments**

- His trip on the ship, "The Beagle."
- His studies on Beetles.
- His studies on Earthworms.
- His Theory of Evolution.
- His many other published works.

## Charles Darwin's Destiny

In his autobiography, Darwin states, "I had gradually come by this time (1836-1839), to see that the Old Testament was no more to be trusted than the sacred books of the Hindus or the beliefs of barbarians."

Darwin finally accepted, in 1837, what he had come to believe to be a fact - that all species were mutable (and accordingly, his conversion to evolutionism). He could not avoid the belief that man must come under the same law. In 1871, Darwin came to terms with this problem in his book *The Descent Of Man And Selection In Relation To Sex*. Its thesis was "the unity of man with the rest of the evolving world of animate life on earth." Twelve years had gone by since the publication of *Origin*. But the question still remained in the minds of Victorians, that being, were their ancestors Adam and Eve or were they a product of natural selection? Darwin's *Descent of Man*, firmly and positively stated that all humans had a bestial past.

Around 1880, Charles wrote, "I am sorry to have to inform you that I do not believe in the Bible as a divine revelation, and therefore not in Jesus as the Son of God."

"The more we know of the fixed laws of nature the more incredible do miracles become...that the men at that time were ignorant to us...that the Gospel cannot be proved to have been written simultaneous with the events."

Hebrews 10:31, "The Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God." Charles realized that Divine judgment would include his father, brother and almost all of his best friends who would be everlastingly punished. This was "a damnable doctrine."

Concerning his wife, Charles states, "As a biblical Unitarian, Emma believed in an eternal God; Jesus was a creation of God. Living a perfect life, this same Jesus provided eternal life through His death, burial and

resurrection for all those who were morally good."

During the morning church service, the Darwins regularly showed their disdain for the Trinitarian doctrine clearly taught in the Anglican Thirty-Nine articles. When the congregation turned towards the altar to recite the creed, the Darwins faced the other way and sternly looked into the eyes of the other church-goers.

"From his notebook from 1837 to 1839. Darwin made it plain that, in the adherence to Naturalism, there was no need for God to be involved in the ongoing process of the world since the beginning. Natural laws in every sphere, whether they be in the physical or moral, were entirely sufficient to account for change and development."

Did Darwin undergo a deathbed conversion? Stories about his salvation began to appear, it seems, as early as May, 1882.

The best known is that attributed to a Lady Hope, who claimed she had visited a bedridden Charles at Down House in the autumn of 1881. She alleged that when she arrived he was reading the Book of Hebrews and that he became distressed when she mentioned the Genesis account of creation and that he asked her to come again the next day to speak on the subject of Jesus Christ to a gathering of servants, tenants and neighbors in the garden summer house, which, he said, held about 30 people. The story first appeared in print as a 511-word article in the American Baptist journal, the "Watchman Examiner", and has been reprinted in many books, magazines and tracts.

### **What about the Lady Hope tract?**

The main problem with her story is that it has been denied by members of Darwin's family.

James Fegan (1852-1925), a contemporary of Lady Hope, in a letter written a few months before his death, made this startling revelation: "When Sir Francis Darwin, (Charles' third son), says that Lady Hope's story is a fabrication, that denial is quite enough for anybody who knows

the high standards of truth the Darwins inherited from their father." Known as a man of impeccable integrity and steadfast commitment to the cause of Christ, Fegan laboured in boy's orphanages and in preaching the Gospel.

Henrietta Litchfield, Darwin's daughter, came home to be with her father. She closely observed her father's condition. She made the following statement for "The Christian" magazine on February 23, 1922: "I was present at his (Darwin's) deathbed, Lady Hope was not present during his last illness or any illness. I believe he never saw her, but in any case, she had no influence over him in any department of thought or belief. He never recanted any of his scientific views, either then or earlier. We think the story of his conversion was fabricated in U.S. A."

Where was Charles Darwin in the end? In his later years he had studied earthworms. Consistent with deistic theology, Darwin believed that "his remains will move through the bodies of worms and perform some useful functions."

"It is as though the earth is reborn again and again, passing through the bodies of worms. Here was how life was ever ongoing. Worms preserve the past, and create the conditions for future growth. No deity is required for these reassuring continuities. They buried to renew. They digested to restore."

Darwin rejected the biblical picture of humans—that they were created in the image of God. Neither did they possess an innate spiritual nature.

B.B. Warfield states, "And thus, as he approached the end of his long and laborious life...he seemed to recognize the approach of death, and said, "I am not in the least afraid to die." Thus he went out into the dark, without God in all his thoughts.

So, at the end of his life, was Charles Darwin a Saint or Sinner? You decide. But in the end, God will judge.