

# [***A False Prophet Makes an Appearance at the Capitol | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C35-5JX1-DY68-153W-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** Congressional leaders recently unveiled a new statue of Billy Graham in the U.S. Capitol's Statuary Hall.

**Body**

Congressional leaders recently unveiled a new statue of Billy Graham in the U.S. Capitol's Statuary Hall in a ceremony attended by his son Franklin Graham, House Speaker [*Mike Johnson*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/mike-johnson?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), former Vice President [*Mike Pence*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/mike-pence?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and televangelist John Hagee, among others.

The pictures of Franklin in the shadow of his father's statue were a stark reminder that if the apple didn't fall far from the tree, it definitely rolled downhill a while.

Certainly, while beloved by many, the late Billy Graham is a complicated figure. On the one hand, the antisemitism and the anti-Catholic views that marked his early career were horrific and have no place in American society. Full stop. And it is also true that the famed Baptist evangelist was able to grow beyond many of those views, preached at integrated venues as early as 1953, and built bridges between conflicting groups. Polls repeatedly showed him to be one of the most admired and influential Americans of his time.

Franklin, however, is a far less complicated figure. Distorting his father's legacy rather than safeguarding it, the younger Graham has twisted his father's name as much as he's twisted Christ's—and all in the pursuit of the proximity to "hard right" political power that his father repeatedly said he came to abhor. Despite Billy's beloved reputation and Franklin's presence on Capitol Hill for the statue unveiling, lawmakers and reporters should remember that Franklin is not his father, and that he does not speak for most Christians in the United States.

To be clear, while I do have significant concerns about the implications for the separation of church and state of putting a preacher's statue in the Capitol—even a preacher I can somewhat admire—the biggest issue is not the statue. It's the use of Billy Graham's legacy as sheep's clothing to disguise wolves like Franklin, Speaker Johnson, and their allies.

Because when Franklin is allowed to misrepresent his father's legacy unchecked, especially in front of an audience as influential as at the statue unveiling, we risk allowing his anti-democratic, hate-filled, pro-former President DonaldTrump, Christian-nationalist agenda to become more palatable and seem more mainstream than it really is.

If we are to take Billy Graham at his word, he likely would not approve of his son's actions. Indeed, the elder Graham told *Parade* magazine that he had urged Jerry Falwell, Sr. to avoid ***politics***: "It would disturb me if there was a wedding between the religious fundamentalists and the political right. The hard right has no interest in religion except to manipulate it."

Yet, the boundaries between evangelism and activism for which Billy Graham's later years became well-known are now blatantly ignored, dismissed, and defenestrated by Franklin and his friends. Franklin's initial support for Trump's Big Lie, his dismissal of the Capitol Riot of Jan. 6, 2021, as a false flag by "antifa," and his claim that Trump is "one of the great presidents" have surely left his father rolling over in his grave. It's small wonder that he, like Speaker Johnson, is a leading member of [*Faithful America's False Prophets hall of fame*](https://nam12.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Furldefense.com%2Fv3%2F__https%3A%2Famericanfalseprophets.org%2Ffranklin-graham__%3B!!AQdq3sQhfUj4q8uUguY!iI4IgceWXgojEnDCnUq32iQK0cr-TV_IgWz_PnLrc8maCLoPBdZARswN2gXF3ifqF1jRe37qChgZMTs47IpAtJp_xLVr%24&data=05%7C02%7Cj.fields%40newsweek.com%7Cefac2c55cdd449a2ff2508dc76868953%7Cc6bc3eb5d7334f82ba021aa6e30053d3%7C0%7C0%7C638515567424253691%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=ASg0YXOC6jIdGxxW2BamWACqlrfHDia9SGZ5KSDyqN8%3D&reserved=0). (Disclosure: I am the executive director of Faithful America, which represents approximately 200,000 grassroots Christians.)

While, late in life, Billy told *Christianity Today* that [*one of his greatest regrets*](https://nam12.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Furldefense.com%2Fv3%2F__https%3A%2Fwww.npr.org%2F2018%2F02%2F24%2F587809173%2Fbilly-graham-walked-a-line-and-regretted-crossing-over-it-when-it-came-to-politi__%3B!!AQdq3sQhfUj4q8uUguY!iI4IgceWXgojEnDCnUq32iQK0cr-TV_IgWz_PnLrc8maCLoPBdZARswN2gXF3ifqF1jRe37qChgZMTs47IpAtMN9O4UW%24&data=05%7C02%7Cj.fields%40newsweek.com%7Cefac2c55cdd449a2ff2508dc76868953%7Cc6bc3eb5d7334f82ba021aa6e30053d3%7C0%7C0%7C638515567424266910%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=b9sZ52tz4wSFZJ8rfTtGple2DG0I5XISXMe0R%2FUAQ4Y%3D&reserved=0) was being too involved in partisan ***politics***, Franklin is running the other way, snatching up every photo opportunity he can with Trump and other extreme [*Republican*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/republican?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) leaders. He also appeared at Trump's 2020 convention, offering his prayers from behind a Trump campaign sign.

While Billy refused to tell people they would go to hell if they didn't share his Christian views, instead finding more loving ways to spread his faith, Franklin writes fork-tongued articles with titles such as "Progressive Christianity Can Lead You to Hell." Franklin is also a notorious homophobe, attacking LGBTQ Americans—including LGBTQ Christians by name, such as [*Pete Buttigieg*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/pete-buttigieg?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)—with the kind of vicious language that increases suicide rates and turns people off to the church and away from Jesus, rather than inviting them in as his father did.

While Billy Graham sought to be a man of great humility, Franklin Graham responded to criticism with bravado and dismissal, implying that to critique him is to critique Scripture itself. For example, when we at Faithful America criticized the hypocrisy of his misleadingly named recent "God Loves Tour," he [*said*](https://nam12.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Furldefense.com%2Fv3%2F__https%3A%2Fwww.ydr.com%2Fstory%2Fnews%2Flocal%2F2022%2F09%2F21%2Ffranklin-grahams-god-loves-you-tour-stops-in-york-called-unholy%2F69503736007%2F__%3B!!AQdq3sQhfUj4q8uUguY!iI4IgceWXgojEnDCnUq32iQK0cr-TV_IgWz_PnLrc8maCLoPBdZARswN2gXF3ifqF1jRe37qChgZMTs47IpAtPQLunlw%24&data=05%7C02%7Cj.fields%40newsweek.com%7Cefac2c55cdd449a2ff2508dc76868953%7Cc6bc3eb5d7334f82ba021aa6e30053d3%7C0%7C0%7C638515567424275793%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=VtJIC2S6XtK%2FvGAxZaJN%2BNukmtr2BCfD%2FTH7qWvEU9o%3D&reserved=0), "The opposition ultimately isn't against me—it's against what God says in the Bible."

Thankfully, thousands of Christians across the country have seen through Franklin's disguise. Faithful America has gathered 250,000 signatures over the years to call out Franklin Graham's homophobia, xenophobia, conspiracy theories, and support for white Christian nationalism.

But events like the unveiling of the Capitol's Billy Graham statue are signs we can't stop now. That's why we had a mobile billboard calling out Franklin both on Capitol Hill last week and at his tour stops along the border earlier this year, reminding him of his father's words.

Lawmakers looking for feedback from their constituents, as well as reporters covering the role of religion in ***politics***, should not be fooled by Franklin Graham: Despite his ridiculous claim that any organization that criticizes him is only a "so-called Christian group," he is a false prophet, hardly the "Protestant Pope" his father was, and will never be able to speak for the majority of American Christians.

*The Rev. Nathan Empsall is a priest in the Episcopal Church and the executive director of Faithful America.*

*The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.*

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2397666/franklin-graham-capitol.jpg)

**Graphic**

Franklin Graham at the Capitol

Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images

Franklin Graham, the son of reverend Billy Graham, delivers remarks during the Rev. Billy Graham statue unveiling ceremony in National Statuary Hall at the U.S. Capitol on May 16.

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