

#1962—August 2, 2009—“Hall of Presidents”—5

[Gauger:] *Moody Presents* the Hall of Presidents.

[Gray:] Should we not be eager to lay hold of the hope set before us in the Gospels? Should we not receive this gift? Should we not confess this Redeemer?

[Gauger:] This is *Moody Presents*, the Hall of Presidents, a legacy look at the men who shaped the school that Moody founded. I'm Jon Gauger, and it's my pleasure to welcome you to this unique series. It was 1904 when James M. Gray was appointed dean of the Moody Bible Institute. Ultimately he went on to become president of Moody from 1923 to 1934. But that first third of the twentieth century when Gray was so heavily involved saw enormous change in this country. It's interesting, though, that even back then the economic struggle of farmers was the stuff of headlines. Listen to this 1908 clip from President William Howard Taft speaking in Kansas City, Missouri.

[Taft:] The welfare of the farmer is vital to that of the whole country. The prosperity of the country rests usually upon the prosperity of agriculture.

[Gauger:] Again, President Howard Taft speaking about 1904. Well, these were days of tremendous advances in technology, days of change. That's why James M. Gray, a man with his soul bolted to the Word of God, was just the right man to lead Moody during these turbulent times. And no doubt it was Dr. James M. Gray's profound respect for the living, active, powerful Word of God that led him to create Founder's Week as an annual event on the Moody calendar. Maybe you've heard broadcasts on this station. Decades later, Founder's Week is alive and well. Maybe you even took part in this last year's Founder's Week event. That's where we heard a tremendous lineup of speakers, including our closing speaker, Franklin Graham. Listen to this excerpt:

[Graham:] The apostle Paul said, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel, for it's the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." The gospel is the power of God. And Paul said, "I'm not ashamed." I'm not ashamed. Why would he say, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel" unless there were men in his day that were ashamed?

[Gauger:] From Founder's Week 2009, that's an excerpt from Franklin Graham, who was our closing speaker. As we mentioned, Founder's Week was something of the brainchild of James M. Gray, who was president of Moody from 1923 to 1934, but a preacher, of course, long before then. This is a message we're about to hear today from July 14, 1901. That's 108 years ago! He delivered this message at an evening service in Chicago, his text Psalm 19:12. He has titled the message *Secret Sins, Their Nature and Their Danger*. I should warn you up front that this is a very blunt, very in-your-face kind of message and very much the kind of teaching we need to hear today. Now, unfortunately, we do not have James M. Gray's actual voice recorded, but we do have an actor who is reinterpreting the message. His notes were tremendously well developed. I actually read the sermon notes that you're about to hear. This is not just an outline; he wrote complete sentences, so these are Gray's actual words, his actual sermon, *Secret Sins, Their Nature and Their Danger*, interpreted for us today by actor Timothy Love. This is *Moody Presents*, the Hall of Presidents. And now, Dr. James M. Gray.

[Gray:] "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults" (Psalm 19:2). The nineteenth Psalm opens with all the light and freshness, with all the joy and gladness of the morning. The devout singer looks out first upon the works of God's fingers and sees all creation

bearing its constant though silent testimony to its Maker. And as he beholds the first blush of the gorgeous sunrise, the adoration of his soul breaks forth in the well-remembered words, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge."

Then, as if unsatisfied with the revelation in nature's book, he turns with yet deeper feeling to that yet clearer and better witness, the inspired word. And it is as if in comparison with what he has just uttered that he adds, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. ... Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward."

It is no unnatural transition that from the contemplation of that excellent and holy law he should next make an examination of his heart for the evidence of his relation thereto. As another expresses it, after looking into the book of nature and the book of revelation, he now opens the book of conscience, with the result that he finds there a foul, blurred copy that he is puzzled to read. Indeed, he is lost and bewildered in its study and overwhelmed at last by the comprehension of his shortcomings and the conviction of the number and frequency of his sins. He cries out, "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults."

In our reflection on this subject, let us in the first place inquire into the nature of these faults. To whom were they secret? Were they secret only to the psalmist? That is, were they secret only in the sense that God knew about them, and that the world knew about them, while the psalmist himself was utterly unaware of their existence? Such a condition of things is not in itself inconceivable. It is often the fact that our friends and associates are better able to judge of our moral and religious character than we ourselves. They can point out, and often do point out, our weaknesses and inconsistencies, even while we are blind to them. Sin has such a deceptive effect upon the conscious. Almost any one of us is better able to discern the mote in our brother's eye than the beam in our own eye.

David's own history possesses a striking illustration of this. The prophet Nathan came to the king with a story of a great wrong. A rich man with many flocks and herds had not taken from his own flock to give to a wayfaring man who had come to him, but had robbed his poor neighbor of the one ewe lamb that was his sole possession. Instantly the royal conscience responded to the appeal with the declaration, "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die." But strangest of all caprices of the human mind, David did not see how his own condemned himself, nor did he see it until the prophet pressed the application to him with the words, "Thou art the man." Indeed, the story of the ewe lamb was simply a parable used to show the monarch what he evidently had not seen before: the enormity of his own wrong in first robbing Uriah of his wife and then causing him to be killed in battle to cover up his crime. We thus see how one sin may not only be known to God but even to his neighbor, while it is at least unappreciated by, if not absolutely unknown to, oneself.

An earnest Christian once said to me, "The more I study the Bible, the more conscious I become of the commission of sins which I had not previously known to be sins." It may be covetousness, or jealousy, or unwise ambition, or an uncharitable spirit, or any one of a score of other infirmities. The sword may be burnished, the armor be bright, for Satan appears as an angel of light, yet darkly the bosom may treachery hide while lips are proclaiming, "I'm on the Lord's side."

There are doubtless many professing Christians whose sins, though photographed upon the sky, are yet unknown to men and never may be known until the day when what has been

spoken in the ear in the closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops. Can such sins as these be those which David prayed to be delivered from? Partly and for the same reason as before, because he prayed. It is difficult to believe that anyone can harbor such sins and pray to be delivered from them at the same time.

Moreover he exclaims, "Who can understand his errors?" Do not they who commit these things understand them pretty well? They may in fact conceal them from the eyes of men, but they no more deceive their own judgment, it is presumable, than they deceive God. What then were those secret faults from which David prayed to be cleansed? They were not secret in the sense that they were altogether unknown to David, because he prayed to be delivered from them. They were not secret in the sense only that they were concealed from the world for the same reason partly, and also because he exclaimed, "Who can understand his errors?" In what sense were they secret?

It seems to me that we are shut up to this one conclusion, that they were false concealed from the world indeed and concealed, if not in general, yet in detail also from David himself. In the bulk, their commission weighed heavily upon his conscience, but to single out, to enumerate, or to particularize concerning them was beyond his power. They were not secret to him, and yet they were secret to him. "Many books have a few lines of errata at the end," said Mr. Spurgeon, "but our errata might well be as large as the volume itself if we could have but sense enough to see them." The transgressions which we do see and confess are but like the farmer's small samples which he brings to market when he has left his granary full at home.

Paul's testimony has an important bearing on this thought. Even before his conversion, he was, as "touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless," and even after his conversion he exercised himself to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and man. And yet even he exclaimed with reference to indwelling sin, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

[Gauger:] You're listening to the Hall of Presidents from *Moody Presents*, a legacy look at the men who shaped the school that Moody founded. A reminder that all of our Hall of Presidents messages are available on CD, eighteen messages on nine CDs in a very unusual collection available right now at our Web site, moodypresents.mbn.org. Now part 2 of Secret Sins, Their Nature and Their Danger, a message from James M. Gray.

[Gray:] Let us consider the reason of these secret faults. That is, let us consider how it may be possible that intelligences such as we can be guilty of offending God so innumerable often without any positive or detailed knowledge of that fact. In the first place, we may be guilty of this from the very nature of sin itself. Behold, nature is wholly bad, not subject to the law of God; neither indeed can it be. From that point of view, every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is only evil continually. How exceedingly probable, therefore, that in many things we should offend all without always being particularly aware of it. How exceedingly probable that the psalmist is not indulging in hyperbole when in another place he says, "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me so that I am not able to look up. They are more than the hairs of my head."

Second, we may be guilty of this on the ground of ignorance, spiritual ignorance, ignorance of the nature, the meaning, the scope of God's law. Paul may here be brought upon the witness stand again. You know what a blasphemer and persecutor of the church he was at one time, hailing men and women and committing them to prison. In all this indeed he supposed he was doing God's service. "Verily," said he afterward, "I thought there were many things I ought to do contrary to Jesus of Nazareth."

This spiritual ignorance is as common as it is profound. I knew a very ungodly man lying at the point of death who told a Christian minister that he had never knowingly or willingly offended God in all his life. The minister rehearsed to him the Ten Commandments with the interpretation put upon them in the Sermon on the Mount. Until he began to see that, if such were the demands of God, he must be one of the most wicked men that ever lived. I recommend the study of the Sermon on the Mount to any who are inclined to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think.

Listen to these words of Jesus: "I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. ... I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. ... [I say unto you,] let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. ... I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." Let us think of these and kindred words. Let us candidly and prayerfully examine them and see whether in the presence of the truth they set forth our own righteousness does not shrivel into nothing and we be compelled to say, "Who can understand his errors?" and to pray, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults."

And third, we may be guilty of this again through the force of habit. The philosopher Dr. Paley has said that so potential is custom over conscience that there is perhaps hardly any bad action which a man is capable of committing that he may not commit so often as to become unconscious of its guilt, as much as of the most indifferent thing he does. A man becomes so accustomed to winding up his watch at night and at a certain hour that he frequently performs that service without mentally perceiving it. And then he sometimes wonders if it's been done. By the same law of habit, we may neglect any duty until we forget it is one, until we become so unaccustomed and so unused to it as to be insensible that we are guilty of any fault. Yet all the time we are, in truth, treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath and multiplying our iniquities in the sight of God.

If now we have seen how it may be possible for us to commit innumerable faults of which we have no particular consciousness, let us in the third place examine into the guiltiness of such a state of things. The question may have already arisen in some minds whether we can be held accountable for such faults as these. Can that be sin, we ask, of which at the time of its commission man is so unconscious? Does God esteem us blameworthy for crimes of ignorance? And why not? How came our ignorance? Who is responsible for it? God did not make us so. Antecedently, man was created holy. The present darkness and confusion in his soul is the consequence of sin, but sin is the consequence of his folly.

Take the case of some man who has fallen into the habit of a particular sin. He has committed it so often as to have lost the perception of its wrongdoing, but does that lessen his culpability? If a man commits arson or murder when he is drunk, for example, is his criminality diminished or aggravated by that fact? Why should we take the ground that nothing can be blameworthy but what is known and clearly understood as such at the time of its committal? Then it's only the timid beginning in wickedness who is to be held to account and not the veteran wretch. A man has only to harden himself in his sin in order to commit it without conscience to be no sinner at all. How irrational this is!

Once more, many of the secret faults may be the result of temperament or early education. They may have been born with us, or engrafted by peculiar circumstances in early youth. Here again there is a strong feeling in some minds that we are not to be held accountable for such

things. God will never charge us with the consequences of heredity or accident, it is sometimes said. The poet Burns voices this feeling in the words,

If I have wander'd in those paths
Of life I ought to shun —
As something, loudly, in my breast,
Remonstrates I have done —

Thou know'st that Thou hast formed me
With passions wild and strong;
And list'ning to their witching voice
Has often led me wrong.

Here you perceive the responsibility is sought to be thrown back not merely upon heredity or accident, but even upon God Himself. It is the original excuse of the Garden of Eden. "The woman whom Thou gavest me, she gave me the fruit, and I did eat." Is God Himself to be held responsible for our wrongdoing? Shall we charge our Creator with folly, or shall we put the blame where it belongs, on our own souls, and look up to Him for His mercy, and trust in Him for the remedy which is alone able to bring relief.

Let us finally look into this remedy. It is at this point that the form of the Son of Man appears, but how does He manifest His compassion? In precisely the same way as in the Old Testament economy: by offering up both gifts and sacrifices for sins. Only the one gift and the one sacrifice which He offered for all time was the gift and the sacrifice of Himself accepted of the Father on our behalf. When we come to look into the nature and meaning of secret sins, when we come to consider the causes that give rise to them, when we dwell upon their blameworthiness, are we not driven to exclaim, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Are we not at last shut up to the conclusion that we need a Savior? Do we not see ourselves hopelessly condemned before the bar of God? Are we not prepared to throw ourselves upon His mercy? Are we not ready to accept any offer of salvation which He may present to us? Should we not be eager to lay hold of the hope set before us in the gospel? Should we not lift our faces from the dust to praise Him for the free gift of forgiveness, justification, and eternal life through Jesus Christ? Should we not receive this gift? Should we not confess this Redeemer? Should we not consecrate our lives to His service? Should we not crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts? Should we not mortify our members which are upon the earth? Should we not come to experience a godly sorrow and repentance not to be repented of? Where in all the range of human thought can you find arguments of greater cogency or motives of greater force leading you to seek a fellowship with God through faith in Jesus Christ than those suggested in this explanation and this prayer of David: "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults."

[Gauger:] From a message first heard July 14, 1901, that's actor Timothy Love recreating James M. Gray's message *Secret Sins: Their Nature and Their Danger*. Today's presentation was a word-for-word transcription right out of James M. Gray's notes, and it's part of a message series we're calling the Hall of Presidents. Now, because many people are asking, the answer is yes, you can get these messages on CD. Go to our Web site, moodypresents.mbn.org, and click on the link their called Hall of Presidents. We've got eighteen messages packaged on nine CDs. You'll find it right there at moodypresents.mbn.org. I'm Jon Gauger, saying thanks for being with us today. I hope you'll come back next week to the Hall of Presidents, when we'll feature a message from William Houghton. We'll hear an actual recording of Houghton's message *Christ the Divine Song*. I hope you'll join us then right here on *Moody Presents*, the Hall of Presidents.