

#1966—August 30, 2009—“Hall of Presidents”—9

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

[Sweeting:] We cannot climb the ladder of self-effort to heaven. In fact, Jesus came down the ladder and met us where we were, sinful, guilty, helpless, and undone.

[Gauger:] He was born in Haledon, New Jersey, in 1924. As a young boy he committed his life to Christ and felt a calling to pursue ministry. As an answer to that call, he enrolled at Moody Bible Institute and graduated in 1945. His name: Dr. George Sweeting. This is *Moody Presents* the Hall of Presidents, a legacy look at the men who shaped the school that Moody founded. Dr. Sweeting served as pastor and evangelist, preaching the gospel in various churches from New Jersey to Chicago and around the world. In 1971 Dr. George Sweeting was named sixth president of the Moody Bible Institute, the only president, by the way, to have also attended the school. Nineteen seventy-one, as you will recall, was a very turbulent year in American history. The war was raging in Vietnam, President Nixon withdrawing troops, the media in a frenzy. Apollo 14, the third manned mission to the moon, went off that year successfully. In 1971 cigarette commercials were banned from television. In 1971, as Dr. Sweeting took over the reins of the school from William Culbertson, great change began to take place. Evening school opened in twenty-one off-campus locations. The Pastors' Conference was initiated. Our graduate school was formed. Moody Radio saw tremendous expansion with the addition of KMBI in Spokane in 1974. One year later we went to Florida with WKES. And in 1979, WRMB in Boynton Beach, Florida, went on the air. So you get the idea of the pattern of growth under Dr. Sweeting's leadership. Dr. Sweeting—no question about it—from day one was an innovator. He brought to life a vision for a radio broadcast, a national program that would showcase what God was doing through and in the ministries of Moody Bible Institute. He called it *Moody Presents*, and the first program went on the air on November 9, 1971, with host Brandt Gustavson. Now, thirty-eight years later, the program is still going, but here's what it sounded like in 1971, the very first program—the same hymn, but a very different sound.

[music: “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”]

[Gustavson:] From the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, this is *Moody Presents*. I'm Brandt Gustavson, with a program highlighting the message and ministries here at MBI.

[Gauger:] That's the voice of Brandt Gustavson, who for many years served as host of *Moody Presents*. A very gifted communicator in his own right, Brandt Gustavson was the host of *The Poets' Corner*, *What Goes On Here?* and other programs on Moody Radio. Ultimately he served as the director of development at Moody Bible Institute, and after a number of years went on to serve as president of the National Religious Broadcasters in Washington, DC. He went home to be with the Lord some years ago, but Brandt Gustavson is remembered with a smile—a great, great man of God and a terrific communicator, a wonderful addition as the host of *Moody Presents*. What you're about to hear now is Brandt Gustavson introducing a student testimony. We like to play testimonies of real Moody students on the broadcast, and that's the way it started out in 1971. Here's Brandt Gustavson.

[Gustavson:] *Moody Presents* gives us a wonderful opportunity to share our students with you. Here today is senior student Paul Lambert, vice president of the student council.

[Lambert:] When I was six, a group of my friends and I made it a habit to attend a weekday Bible class out in Ceres, California. I'll never forget Mrs. White. She was the leader of the class, and

on every Wednesday afternoon she opened her home and very simply explained who Jesus was and what He had done for all of us primary guys. One evening before I went to bed, I knelt and I prayed a very simple prayer of faith and invited Christ into my heart, a decision I've never regretted. By the time I was a senior in high school I decided that I wanted to study the Bible very seriously. I looked at an awful lot of catalogs and read numerous pamphlets on colleges in America. Finally I decided on Moody. The reason I decided on Moody was because of its reputation of being a professional Bible school. I knew that there would be a time here that I could reflect, question, and pursue the things of God and not have to worry about other academic studies, because the Bible was the center of the curriculum here at Moody. I am awfully glad I've come to Chicago to study, because here in Chicago I've met many Christians who are awfully excited and ambitious about Christ, and I guess I've been caught up in this enthusiasm as well. Probably the most exciting thing about being here at Moody for me right now is currently knowing that I'm in the will of God.

[Gauger:] A Moody student thirty-eight years ago, that was Paul Lambert on the very first *Moody Presents* broadcast. Well, Dr. Sweeting has always had a great grasp of radio listening habits, and he knew that you had to pull people in. So every *Moody Presents* program there was a moment at which he would give a little sneak preview into his message. Here he is from November 9, 1971, pulling us all in.

[Sweeting:] One hundred million people in the United States call themselves Christians, but what is a Christian anyway? In a few minutes, I want to share what the Bible has to say about the word *Christian* and what it means to be a Christian.

[Gauger:] Dr. Sweeting, giving listeners something of a sneak preview of his message on that broadcast. Well, music played a very important role in the *Moody Presents* series back then. Soloists and ensembles were always featured, and the music was always handpicked for Dr. Sweeting's message. Case in point, the selection you're about to hear: "I'll Tell the World That I'm a Christian" ties in beautifully to Dr. Sweeting's message. The soloist is Bill Pearce. Now, Bill Pearce for many, many years associated with Moody Radio, one of the world's finest trombone players, but also a very gifted vocalist. Here he is singing "I'll Tell the World That I'm a Christian."

[Music: "I'll Tell the World That I'm a Christian"]

[Gauger:] You know, seated here in Studio B listening to Bill Pearce sing "I'll Tell the World That I'm a Christian" is a rather interesting moment for me, because I am seated in Studio B, the very studio where Bill Pearce would have recorded that song. Perched atop the eleventh floor of Crowell hall, Studio B has for many, many years—decades—been the very nerve center of Moody Radio. On the wall to my left is a plaque that would have been here when Bill Pearce sang that song. It says, "Your song may be used to save a soul. Sing it prayerfully." I think Bill Pearce embodied that as well as anyone. Music, a very, very important part of *Moody Presents*. And of course at the very heart of the broadcast, the teaching of the Word of God. Dr. Sweeting recorded his sermons right here in Studio B, where I am seated. I remember as a Moody student being a production assistant, being a part of *Moody Presents* back then. We celebrated the one thousandth *Moody Presents* program. Had a big celebration and cake in the studio, and everybody was gathered around—host Brandt Gustavson and Dr. Sweeting. Boy, what a time that was, but that was nearly one thousand programs ago, because we're at 1965 today! Ah, but enough of trivia. Let's get to the message. Dr. George Sweeting, sixth president of the Moody Bible Institute. His topic on that first broadcast in 1971, What Is a Christian? Let's take a walk down the Hall of Presidents, as we hear now from Dr. George Sweeting.

[Sweeting:] The word *Christian* was born in scorn and ridicule. In the city of Antioch of Syria, a city of a million people, the followers of Jesus were given this nickname. This word appears three times in the New Testament—first in Acts 11:26: “And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” The word *Christian* is found again in Acts 26:28: “Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.” Thirdly it’s found in 1 Peter 4:16: “If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.”

To be a Christian in the early centuries was a life-and-death proposition. It was a faith for heroes. To be a Christian often meant facing the pagan arena, the wild beasts. It meant a narrow gate, a restricted way, the denial of self, shouldering a cross and following Jesus Christ.

The word *Christian* is the combination of two words: *Christ* and *man*. When man is united with Christ, they form one word: *Christian*. My friend, a Christian is the combination of Christ and you. The sinner receives a Savior, and the Savior receives the sinner. Christianity is Jesus Christ living through you and me.

The word *Christian* has been corrupted. It has been pulled and stretched to include the whole civilized world. Often this great word is misused, misunderstood, and misappropriated. Thousands of people call themselves Christians who have no claim to that name at all. There are some today who tell us that all civilized people are Christians. Others suppose that this word includes all Gentiles and excludes all Hebrews. To the contrary, there are many splendid people who are Jewish and Christian, and sad to say there are thousands of Gentiles who are not Christians in any way, shape, or form. The concept of Christianity has become so distorted that millions today do not know the difference between spiritual regeneration and mere religious profession.

Recently I asked a man, “Are you a Christian?” Somewhat embarrassed, he replied, “I was born in the United States of America.” The story is told of two American sailors marooned on a South Sea island. Fearing the natives, the sailors hid until one day they heard some of the inhabitants speaking perfect English. In relief, the marooned men exclaimed, “We’re among Christians!” Sad to say, they equated speaking English with Christianity.

My friend, no one has the right in his unforgiven state to say, “I am a Christian.” You say, “But why?” The Bible tells us plainly that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” God’s justice and holiness demand that sin be paid for and dealt with. Jesus, God’s Son, voluntarily died to atone for the sins of the world. When you and I in faith receive Christ, then and only then do we have the power or the legal right to say that we are the children of God.

The apostle John put it this way: “As many as received him [that’s Christ], to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” So first of all, a Christian is one who has received Jesus Christ.

Religion is in today. In fact, the world is full of people who say, “I believe in God,” or “I believe in Christ,” or “I believe in the Bible.” However, often the lives of such people do not correspond with what they claim to believe. This is not a saving faith; this is a spurious faith, a dead faith. The Bible says, “Faith without works is dead,” and again, “By their fruits ye shall know them.” If there is no difference of life, no distinction in a person’s behavior, then I am afraid that such individuals are in the flesh, and the Bible says “of the flesh [they will] reap corruption.”

There is not a prisoner in the world who doesn’t believe it’s best to be honest, but this doesn’t make them honest. And there is not a drunkard who doesn’t believe that it’s best to be sober,

but mere belief does nothing to change the condition. Faith has come to be thought of as a mere acquiescence to the Word of God. This kind of faith is deadening, my friend. My friend, this kind of faith is a damning faith.

[Gauger:] In case you've just joined us, we're listening to a very special Hall of Presidents message on *Moody Presents*. Our speaker, Dr. George Sweeting. A reminder that all our Hall of Presidents messages are available in a CD collection available for purchase at our Web site, moodypresents.mbn.org. That's moodypresents.mbn.org. Just look for the Hall of Presidents icon and click on that button when you visit moodypresents.mbn.org. Now the conclusion of Dr. George Sweeting's message, What Is a Christian?

[Sweeting:] Never forget that the Bible says "the devils ... believe, and tremble." And the difference between head belief and heart belief is the difference between heaven and hell. Any faith that does not change the life of the individual is not saving faith; it is a deceiving faith.

Just for a few moments, though, let's think about what a Christian is not. I remember well the happiness of my boyhood days. On Sunday, all six children accompanied Mother and Father to church. Our meals were always started with family prayer, and we read the Bible as a family. Ours was a Christian home. What a wonderful inheritance! And yet because of this inheritance we did not automatically come into the family of God. You see, relationship to the redeemed doesn't bring redemption. Kinship to Christians cannot make one a Christian. God's salvation—remember this—is not by natural generation. In other words, physical birth in a Christian home cannot make one God's child.

The gospel of John, chapter 1, verse 13 reads, "Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." John is simply saying that no one becomes a Christian by virtue of earthly parents. The blessings of a good father and mother ... this is great, but this doesn't make one a Christian. You see, God has no grandchildren. Being born in a garage doesn't make one an automobile, and being born in a cracker box doesn't make a mouse a cracker. Godly parents give us a push in the right direction, but salvation is a definite personal decision.

The Jewish people used to say, "We have Abraham as our father," and they rested in this. They thought, therefore, they were safe and secure. The exponents of Nazism boasted a pure Aryan blood. They talked of a super race. This too is unscriptural. In the Bible, the mystery of blood is in the heritage of sin, derived from Adam by natural birth. The mystery of blood is also seen in salvation, purchased through the blood of Christ through being born again. John the apostle is simply saying that no one becomes a Christian through natural birth.

Again, the gospel of John, chapter 1, verse 13 states that good works cannot make one a Christian: "nor of the will of the flesh." I imagine that the greatest error that prevails today is that people can become children of God through personal effort. Thousands imagine themselves Christians because of their conduct, because of their religious activity. In direct contrast, John tells us that one does not come into God's family through the will of the flesh. Salvation, my friend, is a gift; it is not a demand.

I once asked a faithful church attender if she were a Christian. She quickly answered, "I've taught in the Sunday school for sixteen years." Naturally I congratulated her and kindly repeated the question, "Are you a Christian?" She then told me of her efforts in the missionary society, but she didn't answer my simple question. You see, this lady was depending on effort to bring salvation. If being active in religious work made one a Christian, she would have been one

many times over, but the Bible simply says, “nor of the will of the flesh.” We cannot climb the ladder of self-effort to heaven.

In fact, Jesus came down the ladder of incarnation at Bethlehem’s manger and met us where we were, sinful, guilty, helpless, and undone. The message of the Bible is plain. Paul states, “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Salvation is not something you do, dear friend, but Someone you receive. Salvation is Someone, and that Someone is Jesus Christ. It would be easier to tunnel through the mountains with a wooden spoon than get to heaven by character or morality. God’s salvation is a free gift; it is not a demand.

Third, religious ordinances cannot make you a Christian. The third phrase of the thirteenth verse of John 1 states, “nor of the will of man.” Recently I asked my doctor, “Are you a Christian?” He started to tell me that he was baptized by pastor so-and-so some years ago. After further discussion, I learned that he was banking everything on the ordinance of baptism rather than faith in Jesus Christ. No man, no matter how prominent or how pious, can make you a Christian. The erroneous idea that some religious leader can make one a Christian by some religious act is false and absolutely contrary to the Bible. No church ordinance, however important and wonderful, can forgive sin.

A tramp, obviously under the influence of alcohol, approached evangelist D. L. Moody. “Mr. Moody,” said he, “you’re the man who saved me.” As the great evangelist observed his bearded face and bloodshot eyes, his torn clothing, he said, “Yes, it looks like I saved you. If God had saved you, you wouldn’t be in that condition.” Ministers are instruments of God to perform God’s bidding. As Paul said, we’re laborers together with God, but never can a man confer salvation or forgiveness on another. Forgiveness, my dear friend, does not come from a wooden cross or from a wooden confessional—not from man, but God alone.

There are those who say we can’t believe what we don’t understand. In reality, we believe so much we don’t understand. You see, no doctor understands the marvel of the digestive system, and yet we wouldn’t say, “I will not eat until I understand the digestive system.” Who understands the wind? Yet it’s very real. When we see the boats sail, we say, “The wind is blowing.” When we see the clouds skip along the horizon, we say, “The wind is blowing.” When we see the trees bend and the dust fly, we conclude that the wind is blowing. Jesus said in John 3:8, “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one ... born of the Spirit” of God.

So I ask, have you experienced God’s wonderful salvation? A Christian is one who is born of God. It’s the combination of Jesus Christ and you.

From history’s pages we learn of a cowardly young soldier in the army of Alexander the Great. Whenever the battle grew hot, the young man would retreat. The general’s pride was cut because this timid soldier also bore the name Alexander. One day Alexander the Great sternly addressed him and said, “Stop being a coward, or drop that good name.” That is the burden of our broadcast today. We’re calling upon you, upon Christians across our world, to live up to the dignity of the name *Christian*. We’re calling upon God’s people to cast themselves upon the Lord in humility for a spiritual awakening. We’re earnestly calling upon friends who have never reached out in faith to receive Jesus Christ as Savior. May this be your moment of decision.

[Gauger:] From the 1971 premier broadcast of *Moody Presents*, that’s Dr. George Sweeting, sixth president of the Moody Bible Institute, airing here on our Hall of Presidents series. You get

the idea that Dr. Sweeting wanted listeners—wants you—to understand truly who Jesus is and what it means to be a Christian. Maybe there were some things shared in this message that are new for you. Maybe as you listen you say, “I’m not sure that I am a Christian—not in the biblical sense of the word.” Well, if you’d like help working this through, if you’d like help beginning a relationship with Jesus Christ, a friendly volunteer is waiting to talk with you right now at 888-NEEDHIM. That’s a toll-free call. Nobody will ask you any embarrassing questions; you’ll steer the conversation. You’ll ask the questions and begin your own relationship with Jesus Christ. 888-NEEDHIM. Maybe as this next song plays you’ll want to take this song as your moment to call 8888-NEEDHIM We’re about to hear soloist Burt Kettinger, for many years the soloist on *Moody Presents*. His song heard thirty-eight years ago, “The Savior Is Waiting to Enter Your Heart.”

[Music: “The Savior Is Waiting to Enter Your Heart”]

[Gauger:] From 1971, that’s Burt Kettinger, the soloist on *Moody Presents* for many years. Well, I hope you have enjoyed today’s broadcast with Dr. George Sweeting, our sixth president. A reminder that you can hear each and every message that you hear on our Hall of Presidents series online but also as part of a CD collection that we would love to place in your hands. Complete ordering information at our Web site: moodypresents.mbn.org. Again, that’s moodypresents.mbn.org, and just look for the Hall of Presidents button. You’ll find everything you need to know about ordering the CD set. Next week, another message from Dr. George Sweeting. I’m Jon Gauger, hoping you’ll join us then right here on *Moody Presents*, the Hall of Presidents.