

Inferior Churches

by Jack Hyles

Jack Hyles emphasizes the critical role of local churches in America and warns against the rise of inferior churches that stray from biblical principles.

Scripture: Matthew 16:18, Acts 2:42, 1 Corinthians 3:1, 2 Corinthians 9:7, 2 Corinthians 11:3

Topics: "Local Church", "Christian Institutions"

Description

Jack Hyles preaches about the importance of churches in America, emphasizing that everything good in the country is supported by the church and there is no substitute for it. He expresses concern about Christian colleges and schools that overlook the significance of the local church, stressing that these institutions should prioritize church attendance for their students. Hyles highlights the dependency of Christian institutions on the local church for support and emphasizes the need for these institutions to prioritize feeding the people who support them.

Transcript

"And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" 1 Corinthians 3:1-3

Now you have heard me say again and again and again what I am about to say. I could not say it enough and so I'll say it many more times. The great need for America is churches. Everything that is good in America is supported by the church. There is no substitute for a church.

You know I have a great concern about Christian colleges and Christian schools who make light of the church. I think every Christian college in America and every Christian Bible school ought to make their kids go to church on Sunday night. Amen. If you won't say it, I'll say it. They ought to make them. There ought not ever be anything at a Bible school or Christian college to compete with the local New Testament church. Do you know why? The church feeds that institution. Where do the Bible college and Bible school get their students? They get the students from the churches.

Listen. Every Christian institution in America, whether it's a Christian magazine, a radio program, a Christian high school, a rescue mission, a Bible college, a seminary, is dependent on the local church, and if she has any sense, she'll feed the people that feed her.

Let us take an organization like Child Evangelism. I'm not against it at all. I'm for it. When a person becomes a teenager, where do they go if Child Evangelism is where you invest your life? Or suppose you invest your life in Youth for Christ or Campus Crusade? Where's the child going to go? Now I'm not opposed to those. I am opposed to some of this rock music they play, but I am not opposed to the Campus Crusade or Youth for Christ. I'm for them.

A young lady came to my office the other day and she said, "I went to the Woodmar Methodist Church here in Hammond. I grew up there. I went off to college at the Indiana University. My roommate there was a Christian, and I realized the roommate had something I did not have. I wanted what she had, and so I was saved.

Then she said, "Campus Crusade was on the campus there, and I started fellowshipping with Campus Crusade, and now I'm back home. I want to go to California to train to work full-time with Campus Crusade. I wanted to ask you if you could give me some names of people, or you yourself, or the church, or something could support me financially as I go to school this summer and train to work with Campus Crusade."

I said "Where do you go to church now?" She said, "Woodmar Methodist." Now, I'm not trying to be unkind, it just so happens that that's not the most fundamental church in this area.

Well, you say, "Brother Hyles, I don't believe in calling names of churches." Well then, don't do it. I'd suggest you do not do that. I don't call names of fundamental churches or Bible-believing churches either. You'll never hear me criticize, at all, a church that believes the Bible. But, brother, if a church doesn't believe the Bible, but doesn't say so, I'm going to say so for them.

I said, "Why did you come to me?" She said, "I've been born again and I recall, when I was a teenager, some folks from First Baptist Church came by and tried to get my family saved. When I

got saved and wanted to serve the Lord and wanted to raise some money to go out and work for

Campus Crusade, I thought the best place to start was First Baptist Church Hammond."

You see? Now, if she had wanted to have a march on Selma or a demonstration or something she would have gone to her church. (You don't like this, do you? Well, you better get used to it.) We have folks in our church that say, "I like you when you preach the Gospel." So when I get off on something like this, they'll go "Hmmpf."

But anyway, now the honest truth is, that the institution you had better pump up is the church. That is the great need. That is what America has to have. Look, Youth for Christ is not the need. I'm not against it, but it does not meet the needs of the entire family. Campus Crusade is the same way.

I know people that spend their entire lives on Jewish evangelism. They wouldn't cross the street if a Pollack was saying, "What must I do to be saved?" They'd say, "You go on to the bad place, boy, we're interested in Jews only. If you've got any Irish blood in you, forget it. We just want to get Jews converted."

A fellow came by the office and said to me, "I want to ask you if you have any work with the Jews?" I said, "If they live on the street we are visiting, we do." He said, "Well, I want to show you how to work with the Jews." I said, "Well, between Jews, why don't you get a little Gentiles in there and get those Gentiles converted, too?" He said, "I mean to have a special work with the Jews." I said, "Sure, I have a special

work with the Germans too."

You know, I'm in the mood tonight that we may never go home. If you could see my outline and know where I am on it, you'd be discouraged already for sure. But anyway, now what is the need? The need is for churches - churches.

I have given much of my life, and when I say that I mean I have given of my life, and I have given years off of my life and I have spent thousands of hours, hundreds of days, scores of weeks, trying to get churches started and changed across America because that is the great need. I hope you college students will hear me reall well tonight. I don't want you to giggle when I preach. When I preach the truth, you listen. Get it whether you agree with it or not.

What you need to do instead of going out and building a specialized work - I want to build a Christian radio station - build a church and then get a radio station off the church. I am for Hammond Baptist High School. You know I am. I think a lot of you folks ought to have your heads examined because you haven't gotten your kids enrolled. I mean that with all of my heart.

I'll say a few words about that in days to come. In a few years you graduate. Now where are you going to go, if that's where you invest your life? Do you see? Now I think you ought to invest your life there, but I think you ought to also invest your life in a local, New Testament church. These churches start missions. Who supports a specific mission? The church budgets in many cases.

People oftentimes get saved here and they say, "Brother Hyles, I want to grow in grace. I want to take a Bible course. I want to get all there is." Now I tell you what to do. The best way for you to get all there is, is just to keep your feet right close to the fire in a fundamental New Testament church every time the doors open. That's the great need.

Look, the church is the granddaddy of all other institutions, all other organizations. I preach at other groups. I've preached to the convention for the Open Air campaigners. In fact, I'll be preaching another one for them in the mid-western area in Chicago in a few months. I thank God for them. One of our finest men here works for the Open Air campaigners. I was talking to some of the fellows. I'm for what they do. They do a wonderful work. They say, "Do you have any Open Air campaign work in your church?" I said, "Sure, we just witness out in the open air and inside and everywhere."

The biggest Youth for Christ work in Lake County is right here in this room tonight. It's the biggest in Lake County. The biggest Child Evangelism work, 1,800 in one department, is at this church. The biggest Campus Crusade work in this county is at this church. We get more teenagers born again than all the Campus Crusaders in the state of Indiana put together.

I'm not against them. I'm not against anybody that exalts Christ. But a fellow is a fool if he doesn't work for, work through, and support the institution that funnels and channels support to every other institution in this world. That's right. The local church is that institution.

People come to me often and they say, "Brother Hyles, we don't work through the local church." A fellow came up not long ago and said, "I want to talk to you a while." I said, "All right, what about? Where do you go to church?" He said, "Well, I belong to the big church." "Oh," I said, "First Baptist." "No," he said, "the big church. The blood washed church." That's always a cute way to express "backsliding."

I said, "Well don't you belong to a local church?" He said, "No, I don't have time for that." I said, "What do you want from me?" He said, " A list of your members." I said, "You don't have time for it, because my members are members of a local church."

You see, what he wanted was the names of our people because he knew we built the kind of people that supported his work, you see? You say, "You're off the subject." No, I haven't even gotten on it yet. Really, we're not even there yet. That's the first line. We're not even there. Some of you folks are not liking it already. It just tickles me to death when folks don't like it! I just add thirty minutes to the sermon, just like that, if everyone doesn't like it. I'm blood washed, too. I'm as blood-washed as you. I've been born again. I belong to the big church, too. But let me tell you something right now.

Here's a fellow who goes out to a fight. You say, "What company are you in?" "I'm in the big army." "Well, what platoon, what regiment?" "I'm in the Washington army." The honest truth is you wouldn't even have these organizations if there were not good old-fashioned fundamental New Testament churches to support you and care for you and get people save. So you can write them letters and ask them to send you money.

Now I'm not against it at all. If you're sending money to any organization I mentioned tonight and they're preaching the Gospel, you will never and have never heard me criticize you for it. One reason is I don't preach storehouse tithing. I practice it, but I don't preach it. I give my tithe to the local church, but I don't preach it, because I don't want to be selfish.

I think the best place to give the tithe is to the local church. I'll never criticize you because you don't. But, if you want to send your tithe somewhere outside the church, I won't even preach as strongly as I believe about it, lest I become selfish with the money of my people, and I don't want to do that. I'm going to show you how churches become inferior, according to the Bible. Now please don't leave me or let me lose you. Stay with me all the way. I want to show you how churches became inferior.

In the Bible there were few really great churches. Now that's a very interesting thing. The church at Jerusalem was, for a while, a great church. I think the greatest church in all the Bible was the church in Antioch. I have a sermon I preach in Bible conferences, once every year or so, on the church at Antioch. I think it was far and away the greatest church in the Bible.

In the first place, the church at Antioch was started by Christians who were persecuted because of the death of Stephen. It says that there was a persecution of those because of the death of Stephen, and the persecution arose and the Christians left Jerusalem and migrated north and went as far as Phoenicia and on to Antioch. They started a church on people who were persecuted because they witnessed for Christ.

It was a church where the people were first called Christians. The Christians never named themselves Christians. They didn't get together and say, "Let's call ourselves something," and they voted to call themselves Christians. No. The people of Antioch saw these people and said, "You folks are so much like this man called Christ." They called them Christians.

Something else about the church of Antioch. It was a church that helped the needy. When the church at Jerusalem had some problems, or folks needed help, food-wise and so forth, they took an offering at Antioch and sent help to the church at Jerusalem. Not only that, the church at Antioch was the church that sent out the first church missionaries.

Paul and Barnabas and John Mark left the church and went to Cyprus and on to Pamphylia. Then John Mark came back from Pamphylia because he got scared. Paul and Barnabas went on up to Iconium and Lystra and Derbe and Antioch and Pisidia and came back home. The first missionary church was the church at Antioch.

Not only that, it was a church of great pastors. Paul, Silas, Peter, Barnabas and others preached or pastored the church. It was a great soul-winning church. There are other churches in the Bible that were good churches. Philippi was not a great church, I think, but it was a good church. Smyrna was a church that was not a great church, but a good church. The church at Thessalonica had some merit. I do not think it was a great church.

I think there were only two or three, at the most, great churches in the Bible. One, the church at Antioch, two the church at Jerusalem; and maybe, in the early days, the church at Ephesus, were the great churches in the Bible.

Now other churches had good points. Philippi was a loving church. Thessalonica was a church that looked for the coming of Christ and loved to study prophecy. Other churches had good points, but I think that there were only two or three really great churches in the Bible.

Now, there are many inferior churches. In fact, there are more inferior churches in the Bible than there are great churches. Let me just give you a few. There was the church at Ephesus, for example, that became an inferior church because they left their first love. They refused to do their first works. They went from the soul-winning business and left their first love. They lost their heartbeat; they lost their "amen"; they lost their joy' they lost their "hallelujah"; they lost their thrill' they lost their expectancy; they lost their zeal; and they lost their first love. It was an inferior church.

The church at Sardis was an inferior church. It was a church that the Bible says, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." Everybody said, "Boy, that's a live wire church. They have more going on. They have activities going all the time, their fellowship hall was busy every night. They had a name to be alive, but they were dead."

The church at Pergamos was an inferior church because they dwelt where Satan's throne was. Now Satan is the god of this world, the Bible says, "His throne is the world." They dwelt where Satan's throne was, a worldly church. They were inferior.

The church at Thyatira was an inferior church because they suffered a lady whose name was Jezebel. Now, not the Jezebel of the Old Testament, but another Jezebel of the New Testament. They suffered her to run the church. It was run by a lady, and it was inferior.

The church at Laodicea was an inferior church. The Bible says that they were neither hot nor cold and because they were neither hot nor cold, God said, "I will spew thee out of my mouth." (Revelation 3:16) The word "Laodicea" means to please the people; it was a people-pleasing church.

Say, I've pastored here for almost eleven years. I've preached from this pulpit since 1964. I preached from 1959 through March of 1964 in the building that burned next door, the old auditorium, and I have not one time in almost eleven years preached one sermon or given one sentence in a sermon, as far as I know of, to please the people. Now I've said a few things to displease a few. But I've never one time, never one time - I've tried to help the people - tried to please the people.

But the church at Laodicea was an inferior church; it tried to please the people. The churches at Galatia were inferior churches. Why? They sewed back the veil in the temple. They preached legalism. They didn't preach that salvation was by grace through faith. They preached a work salvation and went back to legalism.

The church at Colosse was, at best an inferior church because they were guilty of angel worship. The Apostle Paul wrote a letter back to Philemon, in whose house the church had services, and warned the church against the angel worship that was going on at Colosse, an inferior church. Of all the churches in the Bible - the inferior Colosse, Laodicea, Thyatira, Sardis, Ephesus, Pergamos, all the rest, the most inferior church in the Bible was the church at Corinth. It was the worst church of all. The Apostle Paul wrote and said, "You are inferior to the other churches." Now listen carefully. I have literally given my life, my money, my time, and I think years off my life to grow here on this corner a real church where your family can be taught truth and where they can grow up and be decent from the smallest child.

When a child becomes two years of age, he goes in Mrs. Newton's department. He sits at the feet of a godly lady and godly women who help your child. When a child becomes three years of age and goes to Mrs. Barr's department, once again he has the finest workers in the land. A child becomes four years old and goes to Mrs. Rice's department. I go through there on a Sunday morning and she, with her Canadian accent says, "Come on y'all!" and rounds'em up. She is a wonderful, wonderful worker. Then they go to Mrs. McKinney's department, and they have wonderful Mrs. Burnside, then, Mrs. Simpson and others. I could go on all the way through.

We do our best to give your child, whether three or fourteen or seventeen or nine, a place where he can go and be taught, and a place where he can learn the Bible and learn right and learn decency and learn character. You know it's true. We have taught your kid everything from how to walk, to how to shake hands, to how to pay his debts, to how to sit up and be still in church, from the time they are that high until the time they go off to college.

Why? We're trying to grow a church here that meets your needs. A church that meets the needs of the aging saint facing the sunset yours of life, and yet a church that meets the needs of a teenager with all the decisions of a perplexing society. That's the great need.

By the way, inferior churches are build by inferior people. You know why the church at Corinth was an inferior church? They had inferior people. A church, or any group or any organization or anything, is composed of existing parts. If you want a great church, you have to have great people. That is one of the problems about the great society. That is one of the problems about socialism and communism.

Socialism tries to regiment decency. You can't do that. Decency starts your heart. Helping the poor starts in your heart. Now communism and socialism says, "We'll make you do what you would want to do anyway, if your heart were right with God." So we start at the heart.

Two fellows were on the side of the street. One fellow walked down the street and this communist said to the other fellow, he said, "Look at that. See that man?" He said, "Communism can put a new coat on that man." The other fellow was a Christian and he said, "Yeah, and Jesus Christ can put a new man in that coat."

Now the honest truth is, good people build good churches. Inferior people build inferior churches. But, just as the hen and the egg, when a church is a great church, it builds great people. Which comes first? Who

knows. When I came to First Baptist Church, we didn't have a spring program my first spring here. Did you ever think about that?

Now think a minute. How many were here when I came? All right, you recall we didn't have a spring program that first year. In fact, I'd been here a couple of years and we were still trying to get out of the seven hundreds in Sunday School. Do you know why? Well the first thing you do is make a meal. Then you ring the bell. Do you understand?

The first year or two, what did I do? I worked on the people. Why? Great people make great churches. You've heard me say this. I can see Ken Chamblin, God bless him. He was music director here and he was a young man, very young at the time. He couldn't understand it. He said this, I didn't, he said, "You're the greatest preacher in the world." Now I let him say it! I didn't stop him from saying it. But, he said, "We've got the greatest people. We've got the greatest church." He said, "Here we are with everything and look - 700! Why?" he said, "I know churches in Oklahoma who are in eight and nine hundred and here we are seven hundred." He said, "What's wrong?"

I said, "Nothing's wrong. We'll just keep on building the people and doing what's right and getting everything done and God, in his own good time, will take care of the growth." We worked on the people. My motto in my book, the first book I ever wrote, "I will not use my people to build my church, I'll use my church to build my people." It is morally wrong for a pastor, or a principal for that matter or anybody, to use people to build a work. The work is for the people.

You don't go out and get a bunch of germs so you'll have a bunch of patients and have a record-breaking hospital attendance. What do you do? You build a hospital because you have people that have some germs. The hospital is for the patient. The school is for the students. The church is for the members.

We started working to make the right kind of people, all the demons in hell can't keep you from having a great church. We started working on the people. We got some soul winners and got some folks winning souls and got people saved and built classes and built departments. Then what happened? The church took care of itself. What did Jesus say to Peter? He said, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." (Matthew 16:18)

Good Christians build good churches. Inferior Christians build inferior churches. Good churches also build good Christians. You see? Good Christians build good churches, who build good Christians who build good churches. It is the hen and the egg. There is no place to stop. That is one of the great things about church building; you can't help but succeed.

Look, I could die tonight. (Get those smiles off your faces!) I could die tonight and this church would go on for months. (Now, I think you'd miss me - I said I think you'd miss me - thank both of you.) I could die tonight and the church would go on. Why? The ingredients of a great church have been used, you see.

Now you'd have to get a leader. I think you would call the right kind of a leader. I think you would call a man that would lead you. I think that you would call a man who has experience in leading and a man of enough stature, forgive me for saying it, who could lead a church of this size and administrate a church of this size and so forth.

What I'm saying is this. I'm saying that once you get the ball rolling and get the right kind of people, it reproduces itself. The people, the right kind of people, build the right kind of church, which builds the right

kind of people, who build the right kind of church, which builds the right kind of people. Do you understand?

Now the thing we have to do is always be on the lookout that we are the right kind of people. I want to dissect the church at Corinth and show you an inferior church and what the Apostle Paul said composes an inferior church.

Now, in the first place this church was inferior because she had factions. She had "f-a-c-t-i-o-n-s," factions or divisions, if you please. There are four different groups. Here, hey good, here's one, two, three, four. You folks in the balcony, you'll just have to be guests for a while. The church at Corinth had four groups. They had one called the School of Paul. They had one group called the school of Cephas, or Peter. They had one group called the School of Apollos. They had one group called the School of Christ.

This group over here. You know what you said? You said, "Boy, we like Paul the best. We like him. We like that deep Bible teaching. He's not very good looking and he doesn't holler very loud, but we like old Paul. And, boy, Peter that loud-mouthed, pulpit-beating, long-winded idiot - we don't care anything about him. And Apollis, that silver-tongued orator, that fellow, that R.G. Lee type - we don't care anything about that. We like Paul. We like the Bible study. We like a deeper life. We like Paul."

This crowd here said, "Not us. Boy, you give us Peter. Boy, that guy gets up. He hollers and beats the pulpit and kicks and stomps and he screams, and we like him. We go to sleep while Paul preaches. He's too deep, we can't understand him. We can understand Peter. He's funny sometimes, and we like him."

This crowd over here said, "Not us. We like old R.G. Apollos. Boy, I'll tell you what, he is an orator. The Figures of speech just roll off his tongue. You know, Peter is a little crude when he preaches, we don't care much about that. And Paul, he just hasn't been trained enough. But, boy, old Apollee we like him. We like him best. He's ours. We belong to the School of Apollos."

This crowd over here says, "We're just good Christians. We don't believe in following man at all. We don't believe in getting the flesh into it at all." And you don't. Your flesh never tithed, and your flesh never goes soul winning, and your flesh never builds a Sunday School department; your flesh lays on a bed. Your flesh keeps some money in the billfold. "But we, we're just for the School of Christ."

So they had factions in the church. And you know what they would do? This crowd over here, the Paulites, wouldn't even speak to the Cephasites. And the Cephasites wouldn't even speak to the Apollosites. And the School of Christ, they were such good Christians they wouldn't speak to anybody. I mean they were really dedicated, sanctified, petrified. Boy, they were great Christians.

Isn't that something? Factions in a church. It's inferior. Paul wrote the church at Corinth and he said, "Some say I am of Cephus. Some say I am of Paul. Some say I am of Apollo. And others, I am of Christ." Paul said, "Who is Apollos? Who is Cephas? Who is Paul? These are ministers. We are all given places in the body of Christ."

Let's take people on the platform here. Each person is different on the platform. No two of us are alike. Look at the men God uses, and you'll find no comparison at all, except they both believe the Bible and are anointed by the Holy Spirit of God. Compare Dr. Bob Jones, Jr. sometime with John R. Rice; and, in fact, compare John R. Rice with anybody.

Compare Dr. Bill Rice. "Hello, neighbor! I was just seein' my old hound dog the other day." Some of us say, "I like John R. better. I just don't like that hound dog in the pulpit." They got some hound dogs in the pews! "I don't like that." Dr. Rice gets up and says, "May the dear Lord help us. She was a noble, good woman. And may the Lord help us, oh, God. Heaven came down and glory filled my soul." Somebody said, "I like him. He's so sweet and kind."

Oh, no, somebody else said, "Give me Bill Rice; he's funny. I like those dog stories. I like those horse stories." and somebody says, "Not me. Not me. I like R.G. Lee. He is like a flowing river, trickling down the rocky mountains, the sun shining. The honest truth is, God uses everybody. Paul said, "Look," he said. "Don't look to Apollos, don't look to Paul, don't look to Peter. We're all serving the same God." One waters and another one plants with the waters. but God gives the increase.

One of the things that can happen in a church like this, that will wreck and ruin the future of this church, is if we get to the place where we get off in factions. Somebody wants to go this way, and somebody says, "I like this." Somebody says, "No, I like this fellow better." Somebody says, "No, I'm for this."

No. You don't do that. That's unspiritual. That's carnal. Paul said, "Are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" That's the way little children do. He said, "I feed you with milk." Every once in a while some super pious preacher will say, "Well, I just determined to preach Christ and Him crucified. That's all I'm going to preach. Just Lord, hide me behind the cross." That's sweet; that sounds good, except it's not right.

Paul said that to the church at Corinth, they were "baby" Christians. Paul said, "I'd like to feed you some meat. I'd like to go beyond the cross and preach the cross and something else. But I couldn't." He said, "Among you I just had to preach Christ and Him crucified."

Now he didn't do that in Thessalonica. He went ahead and preached about the tribulation period and the anti-Christ and a man of sin. He didn't just preach Christ and Him crucified in Thessalonica. No, he didn't. He didn't just preach Christ and Him crucified at Ephesus or Philippi. But he said, "You baby Christians, all I can preach is the Gospel to you. You never have gotten past the Gospel." Why? He said, "Because your carnal. You walk as men, you have factions."

But there's another reason, and this is a dangerous one. Why was the church inferior? Why was Corinth inferior? I will tell you why. Because, listen, they wanted more than there was to be had. Now please hear this. They wanted more than there was to be had.

Let's take the matter of the gifts of the Spirit. God told the church, the New Testament church, to go soul winning. He said, "While you go soul winning, I'm going to give you some gifts that will aid your soul winning." He said, "As you go soul winning, somebody is going to have to take care of the baptismal dressing room, so I'm going to give a gift of helps. Somebody's going to have to count the money and write the checks, so I'm going to give a gift of administration. If somebody gets sick out soul winning, somebody ought to have faith enough to pray for him. I'm going to give the gift of healing, and if you talk to someone who doesn't speak your own language, I want to give some the gift of tongues."

These people said, "Boy, we'd like to have the gift of healing. Oh, we saw that fellow heal. We heard that fellow talk in tongues." They wanted things God didn't even have. It became an ethereal, aesthetic kind of a spooky Christian who wanted more than God intended for them to have. Many of you on Wednesday night have heard me do this. Let me tell you about this matter, gifts of the Spirit.

Every once in a while somebody comes and says, "Do you believe in that gifts of the Spirit?" Sure I do, because God gave them. The Bible says nobody has all the gifts. The Bible says He give to one this gift, another gets this gift, severally as He will. But for you to say that a fellow has got to have the bottom gift, the last gift is tongues, and you say you have to have it or you're not saved, well that's tom-foolery. You have a hole in your head and nothing between your ears. It's ridiculous.

Now here's what it is. You've heard me do this. Let's organize a fire department, you want to? I've done this across America. I'm going to be the chief. All right, now I'm going to have you, when we're at the fire station, shine the trucks. That's your job, to shine the trucks. I want you to press the uniforms. Okay? I want you, Brother Hand, to sweep out the sleeping quarters; and, John, I want you to grease the pole so we can slide faster in case of fire, you see. Grease it after Brother Hand gets down.

All right, now what's your job? I thought you'd say that. That's not your job. Your job is to put out fires. See? I'm sorry to catch you like that. That's your gift. Your gift is to shine the truck. Your big job is to put out fires. But you see, you got so wrapped up in having shiny trucks that you forgot that you're a fireman, didn't you?

What's your job? Huh? Fighting fires. You learned from him didn't you? Yeah, aren't you glad I asked him first? He's a scapegoat. "Dong-dong. Ding-a-ling." There's a fire. Hey! Fire! Hey, Billings, come on! Put out the fire! He says, "Not me. First place fires are not reverent enough. Not only that, those trucks, they make so much noise and smoke," and he said, "it's too spectacular. I don't believe in all of that sensationalism. Besides," he said, "I want us to have the nicest trucks in the whole county. So we might just sing, "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, this little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, shine all over Hammond, I'm gonna let it shine. This little truck of mine, I'm gonna let it shine."

So he shines the truck while the whole town burns down! The church of Jesus Christ is not for gifts, it's for soul winning! The gifts are simply things to aid us and enhance the soul winning. This church at Corinth had gotten more wrapped up in the gift than they had the giver. They'd gotten more wrapped up in the gift than they had the command of God. They wanted things that God didn't even have.

They heard folks talk in tongues and they said, "We'd like to do that all the time." I think they got wrapped up in the doctrine of Five Point Calvinism, excessive predestination. They were always concerned about, "The Lord has chosen some for heaven and some for hell," and they got wrapped up in that Lord's Supper problem. They started taking the Lord's Supper, and one fellow would bring a whole quart of wine and a loaf of bread. They would just have a big, nice Lord's Supper, and they would really get happy. They would go to the Lord's Supper and the next day go out and eat meat off of the idols. Let me say this. One of the greatest dangers in the Christian life is for a person to want to grow in grace beyond what's available and possible.

Did you know the most important thing about the Bible is the primary teaching of the Bible? Did you know the most important thing about prophecy is that someday Jesus is going to come again and we're going to be with Him? It's not the toes of the beast. Now personally, I know about all of those toes. I've got a book on Revelation. And I'll explain all those toes to you and what each toe stands for and what the toenail on the toe stands for and the polish on the nail. I know all about it. I think!

The big thing about Revelation is that our Lord is going to come back and get us someday and take us to heaven. We're going to be with Him. You new Christians, oh it would be so easy for you to get somebody's book and bypasses soul winning and bypasses prayer and bypasses Bible study and bypasses giving and

bypasses local church serving God and bypasses living the kind of Christian life you ought to live, and before you know it, you are so busy getting things that are not in the Bible, that the underlying truths and deep things are forgotten. The Bible is a love letter.

Is anybody here in love? I don't see anybody. Ah, let's see. You're shaking your head. John, I'll use you and Elaine because it's ridiculous to assume - I want - anyway, let's suppose Elaine could love a goon like you. She writes you a letter and she says, "Dear John," and he says, "Oh, I wonder what that means?" Dear John letter -- you've heard about those?"

She says, "Dear John." He says, "I wonder what that d stands for. It probably stands for dumb, she doesn't like me anymore. That e stands for empty-headed. I wonder what the ar stands for? A in the Bible is a symbol of something, and r is a symbol of something else. And let's see, 'Dear John', what could that mean? That J? Could mean I'm a jerk?"

Do you know there are Christians all over that study their Bibles that way? Did it ever dawn on you, John, she might be wanting to say you're a dear? I doubt it. I'd rather think the other myself.

But, now, "Dear John, I love you." "I wonder what that means. Let's see, love in the Bible comes from the Greek word agape and fileo and eros. Let's see. I wonder which one she means. I think I'm going to have her handwriting analyzed." You'll miss the whole thing. Why don't you just read the letter. It says, "Dear John, I love you." And you say, "I'm so glad. That's good. She loves me. Isn't that wonderful?"

The truth is, far too many Christians get so wrapped up in what's not in the Bible, that they don't enjoy the Bible. They get so wrapped up in wanting something; "I want to talk in tongues." Well tongues is not a goal or end, tongues is a means to an end to get somebody saved that can't understand the language that is prevalent.

You know there is a wonderful verse. I won't turn to it, but Paul said to the same Corinthian church in the same letter about the simplicity that's in Christ. You know one of the great secrets of First Baptist Church Hammond? It's the simplicity. I was thinking while you were singing a while ago. I liked the way you sang. I don't think you were interested too much in becoming a great singer. I didn't notice that, did you? I didn't think he was up there trying to sing to present the best solo ever presented. I didn't get that idea. I got the idea that he was trying to put over a message.

Do you get the idea tonight that I'm trying to preach a masterpiece of a great sermon? No, I'm trying to help you. I'm trying to help you. I'm trying to keep you in the simplicity that's in Christ, just the simplicity. The Christian life is not difficult; it's simple. The church at Corinth said, "We want something more than just the Lord's Supper. We want something more than just a simple tongue. We want something more than just what is in the Bible. We want to go deeper and get something," and it became an inferior church because they wanted more than there really was.

There is something else about the church that made it inferior, and that is they didn't give. Now listen to me and hear me well. Nobody ever became a good Christian who didn't give sacrificially. Now a lot of people have given sacrificially who have not become good Christians, but there's no way to bypass generosity and liberality in the Christian growth, no way at all. Nobody will ever become a good Christian who does not give and give and give till it hurts, and give some more and give some more. You know what I think? I think the more I can get you to give to God's work, the more I can help you to grow in grace.

I think I told you about this Methodist who didn't like to go to the Baptist church because they're always talking about money? He said, "I wouldn't go." The Baptist fellow said, "But our pastor's different. He never mentions money. Never does at all." The fellow said, "Oh, I know these Baptists. They're always talking about money." He said, "Not our preacher. Come with me tonight and try it and see."

So the fellow went. The preacher got up and would you believe it, he took a building fund offering that night. This Methodist fellow said, "You know the difference between a Baptist deacon and a Methodist steward don't you? A Methodist steward, if you asked him to pray, would say, "Here. Take this ten dollars instead." You ask a Baptist deacon for ten dollars he says, "Let us pray."

This fellow only had a twenty and a ten and a five and a one. They took the building fund offering and this Methodist gave the one. He punched the Baptist and said, "I told you. Their goal is always money." He said, "I'm sorry. This has never happened before. But, that's all; I assure you of that. He'll never do anything like this again tonight."

Would you believe it? The pastor took a parsonage fund offering. The fellow gave his five and said, "I told you so. Money, money, money." "Boy, I can't understand it. He's never done this before. I assure you. It won't be any worse than this." Then what happened? They decided to take an offering for foreign missions. The fellow gave his ten. When he gave the ten, he hit the pew in front of him and jumped up and ran outside. The Baptist said to the Methodist, "Don't leave; don't get mad and leave." He said, "Get mad nothing, leave nothing. I'm going outside to get change for this twenty. I'm going to see this thing through."

Now I don't care who you are, unless you give, you can't be a good Christian. There is no way in this world to be a good Christian unless you give. Listen. You ought to thank God that you can give to so many good, worthy causes here. Think how privileged you are. You know, in a lot of churches, if you gave tonight in the offering plate, you know what you would do? Some of your money would go to support some dance in some Southern Baptist college. Some of your money would go to support some liberal teacher in some seminar. Some of your money would go to support some missionary who does nothing more than teach folks on foreign fields how to raise good corn crops.

You stop and think about it. We had Jack Wyrzten last Sunday, and you gave him some of your money. He preaches the Gospel in one of the most barren sections of this nation. We have a Christian high school. We're taking up money for it. You'll invest in young people being taught in a Christian atmosphere the Word of God and getting an education in a decent, Christian atmosphere. We pass the plates on Wednesday night, and you contribute to a radio ministry that teaches soul winning and inspires soul winners around the world. How privileged you are.

That's why, when the plates are passed, you ought to say, "Blessed be God." God loveth an hilarious giver. That word hilarious means in the Greek, jump up and down and clap your heels. We ought to say, "Glory to God. I get to give to a high school, to a radio program, to a nationwide book ministry that exalts soul winning in Christ. I get to give to a church that supports only soul-winning missionaries. A church that does not give will become an inferior church.

Let us pray.

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