

THE CORNERSTONE OF OUR FAITH

JESUS CHRIST
THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE
EPHESIANS 2:20

A.D.

The Greatest of All Time
Edward Robinson

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about the author

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how to use this study

Each lesson in this *The Cornerstone of Our Faith* study has four major parts.

Every lesson begins with an introductory section called **The Foundation**. In this section, the author will give background material to help prepare your mind and heart for God's Word.

The second part of each lesson is called **The Cornerstone**. This section is always the heart of every lesson. The Bible is explored in detail to help us understand the text. Those who are accustomed to hearing African-American preaching can hear this section "preach." God's Word is powerfully presented so that all can understand.

The next section of each study is critical for the Word to fulfill its intended purpose. It is called **The Inscription**. Just as people take note of inscriptions on cornerstones or monuments, each lesson is written so as to drive home a point worth remembering and a principle worth following. It offers the encouragement to change attitudes or behaviors to align better with God's Word. To *know* the Bible is one thing; to *do* it is another.

Every lesson ends with a series of thought-provoking **Discussion Questions** that help you explore God's Word on a personal and a congregational level. These questions provide opportunities for group discussion and participation. Teachers can tell by the responses whether their students have really come to grips with the lesson.

introduction

It is sometimes easy to take our blessings for granted. We enjoy them without really thinking about them, and rarely stop to give thanks. The Apostle Paul speaks of our blessings from God's hands as things He has "lavished" upon us. Whether we stop to thank God or not, He pours out great gifts on His children.

When we slow down to take an inventory of our spiritual blessings, we realize that we are richly blessed with the very best. We serve a God who is far superior to any other "god." Jesus is obviously the greatest Savior ever. The Holy Spirit offers the Christian help in the most personal way. We grow spiritually in the most fertile garden, the church, and live a life that surpasses every alternative.

Count your blessings and learn to fully enjoy all the greatness of God that surrounds you.

The Greatest Philanthropist of All Time (*Titus 3:1-7*)

FOUNDATION

The apostle Paul addressed the Epistle of Titus to his son in the faith, Titus (1:4), to remind him of his ministerial mandate to set in order the church of Christ in Crete (1:5). Paul instructed Titus to appoint good and godly men as elders in order to stabilize residents in Crete, who displayed vices of lying and gluttony (1:12). In chapter 2, Paul stressed the words “sound doctrine.” The Greek word for sound is transliterated *hugies*, which gave us our English word “hygiene,” meaning to establish and maintain good health. In essence, Paul insinuated that “sound doctrine” means holy, healthy, and clean teaching. Paul further explained that sound doctrine is sound living; therefore, older women should teach and train young women to be godly wives and good mothers. Senior men should also mentor young men, and bondservants should be obedient to their masters so that non-Christians “will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect” (Titus 2:10, NASB).

In Titus 3:1, the apostle Paul noted that Christian living should never be confined to the worship assembly; instead, our relationship with Christ should also influence our conduct

before secular authorities. Paul wrote the Epistle to Titus when Nero (54 A.D. - 68 A.D.) was in power, and this emperor was notorious for his vile and scandalous behavior. Yet Paul and other New Testament writers consistently urged their readers to be prayerful (1 Timothy 2:1, 2), obedient (Titus 3:1), and respectful (Romans 13:7; 1 Peter 2:17) to secular powers, as long as their laws and customs did not conflict with God's Word (Acts 5:29).

In today's text, Titus 3:4, Paul used a most interesting word for the "love of God toward man." The Greek word is *philanthropia*, which gave us our English word "philanthropy." The word appears only three times in the New Testament: Acts 27:3; Acts 28:2; and Titus 3:4. Luke, the author of the book of Acts, applied the word to human beings; Paul in Titus 3:4 applied it to God. In other words, Paul wanted to remind Titus that God is the Greatest Philanthropist of All Time.



The standard, modern definition of a philanthropist is someone with a desire to help mankind, especially as shown by endowments to institutions. When we think of contemporary philanthropists, several people come to mind. Bill and Melinda Gates have contributed millions of dollars to help AIDS research and the disease's victims. Bill and Camille Cosby have given large sums of money to institutions of higher learning, especially historically black colleges and universities. Oprah Winfrey's gifts to educate young black women in South Africa and to assist earthquake victims in Haiti have been well documented. The generosity of the late Michael Jackson solidifies his legacy as a noteworthy philanthropist. While playing professional basketball, Earvin "Magic" Johnson donated \$100,000.00 to Rust College, a

small black college in north Mississippi. He has continued his beneficent acts long after his retirement from the NBA. In 1995, President Bill Clinton honored Oseola McCarty, an unassuming African American washerwoman, who donated \$150,000.00 to the University of Southern Mississippi to help struggling students acquire an education. These examples confirm that there are many noteworthy philanthropists in our country today.

Even though contemporary philanthropists have given large and impressive sums of money to worthy causes, none of their gifts can compare to Almighty God, for God is the Greatest Philanthropist of All Time for two reasons. First, God is the most amazing and most awesome Giver. He loves and cares for human beings like none other. Many philanthropists give to institutions of value and individuals of worth, but God gave to us when we were unworthy and undeserving. God gave us the gift of salvation when we did not deserve it. In Romans 5:8, Paul wrote: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” He echoed this point in Titus 3:3: “For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.”

When we realize from whence we have come, it ought to instill in us a sense of humility, never a sense of pride and arrogance. God salvaged us when we were unsalvageable. God reached out to us when we were unreachable. God cared for us when we were uncaring. God loved us when we were unloving. He gave us hope when we were hopeless, help when we were helpless, and life when we were lifeless. Therefore, God is inarguably the greatest philanthropist of all time.

Second, God’s gifts are immeasurable and imperishable, unlike the tangible and temporary gifts of modern philanthropists. When contemporary philanthropists share gifts, they

often distribute gifts that are temporary, perishable, and destructible. If a philanthropist, for instance, built 100 houses for 100 homeless families, those structures over time would decay and decline. If a philanthropist purchased fifty brand new cars for poor people, those vehicles would gradually rust and rot with the passing years. If kind-hearted philanthropists generously gave medical supplies, such as wheelchairs, crutches, and braces, to disabled veterans, all of those items would deteriorate over a period of time. However, when God disperses gifts, they will last for ever and ever. According to our text (Titus 3:4, 5), God gives us two imperishable gifts: salvation and the Holy Spirit.

Salvation is a gift that can not be earned. It can be received only with trusting obedience and humble gratitude (Ephesians 2:8, 9). The Holy Spirit is a gift that seals or guarantees our inheritance (Ephesians 1:13, 14; 4:30). God's Spirit assures us that we will certainly receive all that God has promised to us (2 Corinthians 1:21, 22; 5:1-7). In addition, the Holy Spirit empowers us to live a victorious life over sin and Satan (1 John 4:4) and to become more like God our Father (Galatians 5:22, 23).

Furthermore, when God gives gifts, they do not *depreciate* in value; instead they *appreciate* in value and worth. A fifteen-passenger van donated to an orphanage by a philanthropist will decline in value and performance with the passing of time. In other words, material gifts will get older and eventually pass away. However, when believers surrender to the lordship of Jesus through faith and baptism, our bodies might get old, but our inner man, who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, is "being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16). In addition, He has given us His holy and divine word which will never pass away. Jesus declared: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away" (Matthew 24:35; see also Isaiah 40:8). That is why God is without question the *greatest philanthropist of all time*.

Since God is the greatest philanthropist of all time and since we are called to be like Him (Matthew 5:48; Ephesians 5:1), God’s children should strive to be philanthropists. Philanthropy, from God’s perspective, is not measured in terms of giving hundreds, thousands, and millions of dollars. We can serve as philanthropists by speaking healing words to the hurting (Proverbs 16:24), weeping with those who weep, and rejoicing with those who rejoice (Romans 12:15). We function as philanthropists today when we give food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, and visits to prisoners, orphans, and widows (Matthew 25:34-46; James 1:26, 27). How much does it cost to give someone a comforting hug or an affirming handshake? How much does it really cost to give a weary soul a cheerful smile? A smile contains healing power (Proverbs 17:22). In other words, you do not have to be rich monetarily to be a philanthropist.



In the fall of 2010, Oprah Winfrey thrilled her audience by announcing that she was taking them on an all-expense paid trip to Australia. Upon hearing Winfrey’s announcement, audience members screamed, shouted, and cried tears of joy. One day, Jesus will return and take His children to a place more beautiful and more enchanting than Australia—an all-expense paid trip to heaven. Now that’s something worth shouting about!

Questions for Discussion

1. How many times does the word *philanthropia* appear in the New Testament? Where are the references?
2. Discuss the modern definition of “philanthropy.”

3. Comment on three contemporary philanthropists. What are some of the benevolent deeds they have done?
4. Compare the gifts of contemporary philanthropists to God's gifts.
5. Based on Titus 3:5, what two gifts has God given us today?
6. What does the Holy Spirit empower us to accomplish today?
7. What other imperishable and immeasurable gifts do Christians enjoy today?
8. Are we called to be philanthropists today? Please elaborate.
9. How can we serve as philanthropists in the modern world?
10. In Titus 3:3, Paul said that we all have done some "foolish" acts. Share with the class a time when you did something foolish.
11. Discuss the phrase "sound doctrine."
12. Discuss philanthropy from God's perspective.