

The Compass

A tool for disciplers

OBEDIENCE



CONVERSATION ON THE JOURNEY

Titus is one of the more neglected books of the New Testament, but it is rich with truth. There are two key observations you should help your disciple discover. They will unlock the treasures of this book. The first can be found by paying close attention to Paul's greeting in 1:1-4. After identifying himself and his purpose, Paul gives his usual salutation. . . sort of. He says, "Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior."

Did you catch it? If you are used to reading Paul's letters, that might have sounded odd to you. Flip back through your Bible and look at his letters. Read the salutation he uses in every letter. Go ahead, I'll wait.

If you actually did that you should have noticed the formulaic greeting he uses in all his other letters: "Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, and on and on, he uses that phrase every time he writes a letter, without fail. That is until he gets to Titus. In this letter, instead of calling Jesus "Lord," he ascribes to Him the title "Savior." In fact, if you scan through the rest of Titus, you won't find a single instance of Paul using the term "Lord." Instead you'll find repeated instances of him calling Jesus the "Savior."

That might not seem significant to you, but hear me out. In all of Paul's letters he uses the term "Lord" 257 times. In every single letter he uses it repeatedly. Even in the extremely short letter to Philemon he calls Jesus "Lord" a half a dozen times. The Lordship of Jesus is constantly on his lips. But he doesn't use it once in all of Titus.

By contrast he only uses the word "Savior" twelve times in his writings. Fully half of those occur in his letter to Titus. 0/257 for Lord, and 6/12 for Savior. Doesn't it seem like Paul is trying to make a point? Jesus is the Savior, the Savior, the Savior, the Savior. Why the emphasis?

Great question. The answer can be found in key number two. If you scan through Titus again (or better yet, read it thoughtfully), you'll find a recurring phrase in addition to the recurring title of Savior. Before you continue reading this, read over Titus and see if you can find it.

Here it is. Are you ready?

1:8 Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good.

1:16 They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

2:7 In everything set them an example by doing what is good.

THIS WEEK'S EXCURSION

The New Testament anticipates life change will always accompany faith in Christ. In this lesson you want to do two things:

1. Explain that the normal life of a believer involves an eagerness to do what is good.
2. Show the proper source for motivation to obey: namely, love for our Savior, not (as some would suppose) fear of the Lord.

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MORE OF THE CONVERSATION

2:14 [Jesus Christ] gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

3:1 Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good.

3:8 And I want you to stress these things so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.

3:14 Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good.

Do what is good, do what is good, do what is good.

A little background

Titus was the pastor of the church on Crete. Crete was a nasty place. According to their own prophet Epimenides, “Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.” In this setting, Paul’s chief exhortation to this pastor is to call his people to live righteous lives. Paul knew that on that dark island the Gospel would shine brightly in the lives of the redeemed. Thus the repeated calls to do what is good.

Paul also knew that it was important not only that they live righteous lives, but that they did so from the right motivation. Some mistakenly believe that we are to obey Jesus simply because He is the Lord. That is, they believe the proper motivation for obedience is fear of the punishment He has the authority to bring. While he is of course the Lord and ruler of all, it is not His lordship that motivates us to obedience. Rather, it is His grace that He offers us as Savior, that moves us to obey.

It is for this exact reason that in Paul’s strongest letter on obedience and righteous living that he utterly neglects the office of Lord, and emphasizes, and even over-emphasizes the office of Savior. We are to do what is good, do what is good, do what is good, because Jesus is the Savior, the Savior, the Savior, the Savior.

It is critical that your disciple understand those two keys (and thereby the point of Titus). Jesus wants His people to be different, but not just different: better. According to 2:14, He gave Himself for us, not only to redeem us, but also to make us into a people that are eager to do what is good. Help your disciple to see that grace is not a license to sin; it is an invitation to a higher quality of life altogether.

Titus 3:3-8 is a parallel to Ephesians 2:1-10 and a summary of the Gospel. Take a look at the two passages and you’ll see what I mean. In Titus 3:8, after summarizing the Gospel of grace, Paul says, “And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.” That is, it is the story of the Savior that we are to constantly repeat, in order to help our disciples lead obedient lives, marked by goodness.

Walk your disciple through Titus, as I’ve walked you through it here. Lead them in discovering these keys and interact with them about the state of their obedience. Don’t just tell them what the keys are. Make them earn it as I’ve attempted to do with you, and they will remember it better. Look with them at each of Paul’s salutations until the phrase repeats in their head. Then show them Titus. What is the difference? What do you think it means? Then do the same with the “do what is good” phrases. Have them scan the text looking for a recurring phrase. The more they discover on their own the deeper the message will sink into their hearts.

Finally, make sure you check out the “Next Steps” section, which has a couple of questions you might ask to help them apply this to their lives.

Do what is good. He is after all, the Savior.

NEXT STEPS

Here are a few starter questions you might ask your disciple once they understand the lesson. Don’t let it be just information; connect it to their life.

Have you been motivated to obey Jesus because he is Lord, or because he is Savior?

Titus 2:7 admonishes, “In everything set them an example by doing what is good.” In what way would you say your life is example to others of doing good?

Titus 3:8 says we are to be careful to do what is good. In what ways are you being careless? (Viewing habits, language, listening to culture rather than Scripture.)

When we think of “doing good” we tend to think of kindness and compassion. Give 7 examples of doing good that have nothing to do with these traits.

What one or two areas do you need to work on doing what is good? How can I help?

SIDE TRAILS

The Pursuit of Holiness. Jerry Bridges. Nav Press.

The Joy of Fearing God. Jerry Bridges. Random House.

The Practice of Godliness. Jerry Bridges. Nav Press.

The Liberty of Obedience. Elisabeth Elliot. Servant Publications.

Faith does not Falter: Selections from the Writings of Elisabeth Elliot. Elisabeth Elliot. Baker.

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